

*jeevadhaba*

# **GOODBYE ! SECOND MILLENNIUM**

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Edited by

**John B. Chethimattam**

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# jeevadhara

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

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## Goodbye ! Second Millennium

Edited by

**John B. Chethimattam**

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## Editorial

History is not simply a chronicle of events but rather the meaning of events that show a definite flow of time and allow us to predict the future. The second millennium of the Common Era that is now drawing to a close mark a clear progress of humanity in its onward march through history. The first millennium saw the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and had several centuries designated as the Dark Ages in which Europe passed through a stage of stock taking. Elsewhere in the world Islam established a vast empire breaking out from its Arabic home in the Middle East expanding in all directions. But the second millennium saw a certain containment of Islam in certain limits and a fresh expansion of Europe and its religious culture. The phases of this cultural expansion give us some clear idea of the future course of the third millennium that is just breaking in. This present issue of *Jeevadharma* examines the many aspects of the heritage that is being bequeathed by the second millennium with special reference to its impact on theological thinking.

The most obvious view is of a continuing effort to move away from the confining effect of imperial Rome and the Roman Church which had imperceptibly slipped into the slot vacated by the Roman political structure. The Popes who presided over this Roman set up like Gregory VII and Innocent III led to a certain de-centralization through the Crusades, which they promoted, by shifting attention away from Europe to the East. This led to a re-discovery of Greece and the subsequent intellectual ferment of Scholastic philosophical and theological thinking. It also caused a rejuvenation of art in all its aspects in the Renaissance. Individual countries of Europe asserted their national independence, and this was reflected in the break up of Western Church through Reformation and the different sects of Protestantism. Many argue that it was the spirit of free thinking that led to great scientific discoveries and that the Protestant ethic led to Industrial Revolution. Towards the close of this millennium we are witnessing a sobering of the passion for infinite progress and the "post-modern" feeling that there are weightier things than solving the problems posed by the material world. My article on the positive contribution of the second millennium gives a brief over-view of this historical development.

There are good many particular strands of development which are not restricted to Europe. An expansion of the mystical tradition that was originally received from the East and later developed by Plotinus, Proclus and Pseudo Dionysius is a special field. In the second millennium it developed not merely as an intellectual pursuit of contemplation but as an explosion of love. Brother Wayne Teasdale, adjunct professor at De Paul University, Columbia College and the Catholic Theological Union, a lay monk who combines the traditions of Christianity and Hinduism in the way of Christian Sannyasa writes on "The Dominance of Love in Second Millennial Christian Mysticism". His book *The Mystic Heart, Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, with a foreword by Dalai Lama is to be published in November.

The great achievement of the second millennium is the revolution in the study of Sacred Scripture. We have come a long way from looking at the whole Bible as a single uniform book, the whole Pentateuch as written by Moses and all the Psalms composed by David and applied different types of textual criticism to the books of the canon of Scripture. Dr. Augustine Mulloor OCD describes the development of Biblical studies through the millennium.

At the beginning of the second millennium Christians of Europe had very little idea about religions other than Christianity. Jews scattered in many cities of Europe were just a nuisance to be controlled by restrictive measures. Muslims were just enemies to be defeated and crushed by all available means. From that antagonistic situation there was an ever evolving consciousness that all religions belonged to the common heritage of all humans, and that they all in some way belonged to the one divine economy of human salvation. Rev. K.P. Aleaz of Bishop's College, Calcutta studies this aspect of our millennial history and examines influence of Hindu Advaita thought on Xtian theology. Dr. George Pattery S.J., professor at Santiniketan university examines the application of sociology, psychology and other human sciences to the study of religion. Dr. Ponnodoth S.J., Director EMRC, St. Xavier's College, Calcutta discusses the application of modern technology to the field of education.

These are only a few aspects of the benefits reaped by religion from the historical evolution of the second millennium of Christianity. Only by properly appreciating them can we appropriately approach the needs and concerns of the third millennium.

## **The Second Millennium of Christianity Its Positive Contribution**

**John B. Chethimattam**

This is a general survey of the 2nd millennium. Emerging from the Dark Ages and the absolute control of the Popes Christians got exposed to a wider world through the Churches. The intellectualism of scholastics freed people from dogmas and external structures to a refreshing reflection on faith. Renaissance brought back and Reformation turned the attention to the centrality of scripture and faith. Today at the end of the millennium people are breaking out of the particularism of Churches and religions to the universal kingdom of God. Jesus himself is the kingdom, churches and religions only sacraments.

December 31, 1999 marks the close of the second millennium of Christianity. Looking back on the thousand years recounted among the past, one can see the great change in human outlook and attitude that has taken place during this period of time. It was prepared by a time of stocktaking known as the Dark Ages in European history. The millennium began with an expansion of consciousness occasioned by the Crusades, followed by a time of intense intellectualism of Medieval monastic activity. Then came some two centuries of Renaissance. The Reformation was a watershed in religious development followed by Colonialism, Industrial Revolution, and Marxist social thought. Finally the contemporary period, which is designated as Post-Modern marks another time of international self-awareness of humanity. Looking forward to the third millennium one cannot ignore the organic development human race has undergone in the past thousand years.

### **A Stage of Hibernation and Preparation**

Though the so called Dark Ages coming after the end of the Roman empire was not part of the second millennium, actually it gave shape to the new era. The prime characteristic of this period was one of recollection when Europe sank back into herself. It was also a time of intense military action against hordes coming from the North, and Muslims attacking it from the East and the South. Chiefs of the northern pirates were baptized and Islam was effectively defeated and thrown

back. Its second characteristic was feudalism, the passing of actual government from the old Roman provincial centres of administration into the hands of each small local society and its lord. Even the Christian society changed from the community of a number of slave-owning, rich, landed proprietors to a society of fighting nobles and their descendants and their half-free serfs. A third note was fixity of morals, customs, traditions and forms of religion that made up social life. Climaxing the civilizing effort of the Dark Ages came the Carolingian Europe (500-850), which saw the expansion of the Frankish state, conquest and conversion of pagan Germans and the reorganization of Christendom under the tutelage of the Papacy. But this short period also ended in confusion with the renewed invasions of Vikings from the north, the Magyars from the east and the Saracens from the south, and internecine struggles among the successors of Charlemagne.

### **The Origins of the New Millennium**

But this hibernation and stock taking of Europe gave origin to a new world order initiated by the personality of Pope Gregory VII, the rise of the kingdom of Normandy and the waging of the Crusades. As Hilaire Belloc states: "they were to produce an intense and active civilization of their own; a civilization which was undoubtedly the highest and the best our race has known"<sup>1</sup>. Normans came to prominence around 1000 A.D., Pope Gregory the Great died full of enormous achievements in 1085, and the Crusades started immediately after his death. In fact, it was the year that Pope Gregory died that Toledo, the sacred centre of Spain was finally liberated from the Mohammedans. Forests of Europe were cleared and the rise of towns reflected the growth of commerce both local and long-distance. There was political reorganization exemplified by the rise of feudal monarchies. Feudal practices and customs as well as the revival of Roman Law offered energetic rulers the principles from which a new political order was achieved. It was in this atmosphere that the Popes appealed for a common effort to free the Holy Land from the domination of Muslim Turks.

### **The Crusades and the Dawn of Political Maturity**

The Crusades, eight in number, which extended over two centuries marked an outpouring of the excess warrior population of Europe and an expression of its economic power. Militarily these strenuous efforts to liberate the Holy Land and the Middle East from the Turks who had embraced Islam were a failure. But they brought a relief to the internal strife of Europe by finding an outside target for the warriors and putting

1. Hilaire Belloc, *Europe and the Faith*: New York: The Paulist Press, 1939, p. 189.

its wealth into greater circulation. It brought about a great increase in Europe's geographical knowledge, and effected a re-discovery of the Greek roots of European civilization. Numerous commercial colonies were established in Eastern cities. Familiarity with Eastern luxuries stimulated commerce.

The early Crusades helped to establish the immense prestige of the Papacy. It appeared as if the whole of Europe was reunited under the new Rome of the Popes. There was a vigorous effort to free the Church and clergy of lay domination and purify it of moral abuses. Pope Gregory VII (1073-85) outlawed the selection and investiture of bishops by laymen. The excommunication of emperor Henry IV who resisted the papal move, and his eventual submission and penance in 1077 finally led to the Concordat of Worms (1122) which ended the controversy. But the conception of authority was very much influenced by the mood of the times. Popes like Innocent III and Boniface VIII trying to defend their position against attacks from the kings of Europe claimed a "spiritual sword" superior to the temporal sword of political power. If till that time priestly authority was considered a mystery and a ministry, from then on it was presented as sacrament and power. The Sacraments were presented as something which the priests alone performed by divine power and this power included not only the commission to change bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, but also control over his "mystical Body" the Church.

### **The Intellectual Explosion and the Discovery of the Greek Roots of European Civilization**

*Besides the writings of Plato that were already familiar in Europe, works and philosophy of Aristotle mostly forbidden by Ecclesiastical authorities became the hottest stuff in schools. "Letters awoke and Philosophy. Soon the greatest of all human exponents, St. Thomas Aquinas was to appear."<sup>2</sup> Christian theology was systematized. For this purpose Aristotle's pagan philosophy was baptized. The Crusades brought about a re-discovery of the Greek roots of Western civilization. Along with Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus, Ps. Dionysius and Proclus were used to rejuvenate and humanize theological knowledge. The schools which were started attached to monasteries and cathedrals developed into universities, the institutions primarily devoted to the preservation and systematic enlargement of knowledge. The Scholastics held that even though philosophy is the work of reason alone, it had to be guided also by divine Revelation, since it was a direct communication from the Author of nature. Hence philosophy and theology had to work together to transmit the Judeo-Christian*

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2. *Ibid*, p. 197.

religious message as well as the culture of ancient classical world. For them philosophy and theology as systematic knowledge, were sciences and had to be organized and taught as academic subjects.

The whole Scholastic move was in a humanistic direction. Thomas Aquinas, the leading Scholastic thinker of the Middle Ages, rejected Augustine's theory of divine illumination as the source of human knowledge and insisted that all human knowledge is ultimately derived from the senses, that the intellect abstracted from the sense data their intelligible essence and that in the process the intellect is kept in contact with concrete reality. Against the traditional view that there were different layers of the human soul, corporeal, vegetative, sensitive and rational, Thomas embraced the Aristotelian principle that anything composite was constituted of essence and existence, and that material things consisted of prime matter and substantial form. For him the rational soul was the only substantial form in man, since one substance could have only one substantial form. In the medieval controversy between Nominalists and Realists Aquinas embraced what is known as a moderate realism, namely the universal ideas found their actual expression in their concrete individuals. He rejected Anselm's "ontological" argument that God could be known mentally as "that Greatest than which nothing greater could be conceived". Instead, he affirmed that any valid proof for the existence of God must be based not on an abstract idea, but upon concrete evidence found in the world of experience. Contrary to Augustine's principle that all human governments were the result of original sin, Aquinas held, that society was natural to man and necessary for his normal development and that government was necessary for the maintenance of society.

### **The Renaissance**

When Scholasticism in its later period degenerated into trivial controversies there was a revival of classical humanism in Italy which came to be known as Renaissance. The people of Italy were most inspired by the classic heritage and rejecting the restrictions imposed by the social and intellectual traditions of medieval family, guild, feudal class and church, they rediscovered man and the world. This emancipation of the individual brought a new rationalism to the conduct of human affairs. The Italian tyrant or despot pictured by Machiavelli in his *The Prince*, rationally pursued the interests of his state and allowed no religious or moral considerations to affect his policy. A new kind of state, the sovereign state, and a new state system of alliances and power balance came into existence.

This rediscovery of the world meant a return towards nature and was exemplified in the art of Giotto, Michelangelo and others showing the triumph of a new naturalistic appreciation of the world's beauties.

In literature writers like Francesco Petrarch (1304-74) deliberately broke with the intellectual interests and methods of the medieval scholastics, who were professional philosophers and theologians writing in Latin. Renaissance marked a wider use of the vernacular and the *Divine comedy* of Dante (1265-1321) was a masterpiece of the age.

Though the earlier part of this period witnessed bad times owing to plagues, famines and wars, after 1450 prosperity and vigorous economic growth returned to Italy and all Europe. There was great technological development. Gunpowder was discovered by the middle of the 14th century, printing press by the middle of the 15th, and the development of navigational aids like the compass and astrolabe made sailing out into unknown seas possible. The true scientific spirit was inaugurated by Copernicus (1473-1543) through real empirical study of the universe and was followed up, later, by Galileo (1564-1642).

### **The Reformation**

Martin Luther an Augustinian monk started the Reformation on October 31, 1517 by posting on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenburg 95 theses critical of the Church especially questioning the power and efficacy of indulgences. It was actually a right reaction against the corruption introduced by the Renaissance popes. This protest movement against the identification of the Church with Christendom, and the worldliness of ecclesiastics was already started by John Wycliff (1320-84) and his disciple John Huss (1369-1415). They began criticizing Church's great wealth and the clerics' interference in politics and calling for a reform of the Church. Scholasticism neglected Scripture and indulged in abstract speculations while the majority of the clergy remained ignorant and incompetent. The Church was in no mood to study patiently the complaints and to effect necessary changes. John Huss's teachings were condemned in the Council of Constance and he was executed. The indulgence issue grew out of a financial arrangement between Albert, the archbishop of Mainz, and Pope Leo X for sharing profits received from the sale of indulgences in the former's lands. Though the indulgences dealt only with the remission of temporal penalties assigned to forgiven sins, these gave a false sense of security to people according to Luther, who through his study of Scripture had come to a deep consciousness of the total unworthiness of man and believed that he could be saved only through "the passive justice with which merciful God justifies man".

The decisive factor that contributed to the drastic division effected by the Reformation was the growth of nationalism according to which each country re-appraised its relations with the Papacy. The publication

of the theses made Luther the champion of nationalists, humanists and reformers of all kinds. In fact it was Leo X's reluctance to displease Frederick the Wise, under whom Luther was, and whom he wanted elected the Holy Roman Emperor rather than Charles I of Spain, that prevented the Pope from taking timely action against Luther's rebellion and summoning him to Rome. When finally Leo came out with his bull *Exurge Domine* in 1520 and Charles who had become the emperor condemned Luther with the Edict of Worms, in 1521, Frederick kept him in hiding.

More important was the radical change in people's attitude towards the official church. When the Roman Empire disappeared in the face of barbarian invasions, the Christian Church was the only stable social factor, and the new experiences began to lose their strength and became suspect. With the rise of Scholasticism the emphasis shifted to the "Book", to be understood only by careful study and interpretation. But with the Renaissance the conviction that all truth was to be found in the past was replaced by a faith in the intermediary part played by contemporary experience in the search for truth. An identification of revelation with an abstract system of concepts or the narrowing down of the hermeneutical subject to the authority of the Church were rather unsatisfactory. The authority of monks or of clerics was acceptable only as long as the texts were not directly available. Once printing put the Bible as well as its interpretations by the Fathers of the Church into people's hands, any one could feel confident to read and understand them by oneself. In this situation one's own personal experience, conviction and faith became the most important in one's personal life.

According to the diversity of concerns and moods of people, Reformation itself took different forms in different countries. In Germany it was mostly a movement of the Princes struggling to use religion for the advance of their political interests. When the ecclesiastical and political authorities tried to suppress Luther's new movement, Karlstadt and Thomas Munzer appealed to the peasants who had for long suffered social injustices and there arose the Peasants' War of 1524. But Luther who strongly objected to the social interpretation of his doctrine, appealed to the Princes and the people's rebellion was mercilessly put down. The Emperor did not want to take sides and declared a "recess" at the Diet of Speyer in 1526, and then the principle was "whose region, his religion", namely let each Prince decide the form of religion for his country. When the Emperor reversed himself in the Diet of Speyer in 1529 the princes issued a vigorous "Protestation" and the followers of the new movement came to be called "Protestants". Even though the Diet of Augsburg, 1530, adopted the Catholic position

against Philip Melanchton's defense of the Lutheran view, Reformation gained ground in many parts under the protection of the Princes.

In Switzerland the tie between humanism and religious reform was much stronger and Ulrich Zwingli affirmed the evangelical conviction of the sole authority of the word of God and gave the humanist battle-cry "back to the sources", the Bible and the Church Fathers, demanding the rejection of many Catholic practices. John Calvin, a second generation Reformer fled to Basel and wrote his *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, stressing justification by faith and the authority of Scripture. He had a distinctive theme "glory to God alone", based on the idea that God's free election was the only ground of human salvation. Radical reformers like the Anabaptists emphasized religious liberty and separation between Church and State. In England where Henry VIII at first vigorously refuted Luther's ideas, Reformation was a purely political affair to declare Henry the sole head of the Church.

The enduring fruits of the Reformation was the cultural code created by Protestantism. In countries like Germany, England and America Protestantism gave a definite form to the culture, even though there were great many Catholics in those countries. Andrew Greeley in his *The Catholic Myth* contrasts the Catholic and Protestant imagination in this respect: "The Catholic tends to see society as a "sacrament" of God, a set of ordered relationships, governed by both justice and love, that reveal, however imperfectly, the presence of God. Society is "natural" and "good", therefore, for humans their "natural" response to God is social. The Protestant tends to see society as "God-forsaken" and therefore unnatural and oppressive. The individual stands over against society and not integrated to it. The human becomes fully human only when he is able to break away from social oppression and relate to the absent God as a completely free individual". According to Donald Worster<sup>3</sup> "Protestantism like any religion lays its hold on people's imagination in diverse contradictory ways and that hold can be tenacious long after the explicit theology or doctrine has gone dead". Alexis de Tocqueville said about democracy in the United States: "I think I can see the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritan who landed on those shores." G.K. Chesterton stated that in America even Catholics are Protestants, meaning that the whole American culture was shaped by Protestant sects. Georg Jellinek in a book called *The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens*, published in 1895 claimed that the source of all modern notions of human rights were the radical Protestant sects like the Quakers and the Baptists.

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3. Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature*, 1993, p.200

### The Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution and Capitalism were in a sense produced by the individualism and spirit of enterprise created by Protestantism. With the rapid introduction and development of machines there came about from 1760 a great economic and social upheaval first in England and then in Europe as a whole and slowly it spread to the rest of the world. The British historian Arnold Toynbee called this 'Industrial Revolution'. But the slow transformation of the feudal society had started much earlier through the Agrarian Revolution which combined small holdings into big farms. A commercial revolution took place in the 15th and the 16th centuries when the great voyages of discovery radically changed the European patterns of commerce. Entrepreneurial capitalism evolved in the 17th century. The factory system grew combining features of the shops of the guilds and of the domestic system. In England textile industry grew rapidly when James Hargreaves invented the jenny for the spinning of cotton cloth. Shortly afterward Richard Arkwright perfected the water frame and in 1779 Samuel Crompton combined the two in the mule. Water power drove the machinery till the invention of the steam engine by James Watt in 1872. Major change in technology came with the invention of steel and the discovery of the process of making coke from coal.

Capitalism which arose in the late 16th or early 17th century was a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution. It is defined as an economic system the basis of which includes a society of free individuals, the private ownership of productive equipment and resources, a money medium of exchange, and opportunity for the individual to maximize his income – profit, interest, or wages – by entering into free contracts arising from rational choice in a free competitive market<sup>14</sup>. The immediate impulse for the development of capitalism came from the discovery of America and the sea route to India which extended the sphere of economic activity for merchants and financiers of Europe. The formation of large national states and the Protestant Reformation also were instrumental since these broke the hold of Catholic religion and led to increased importance of worldly values. The secular spirit stimulated scientific inquiry and application of discoveries to technology and economic production.

Capitalism had its own intrinsic evils namely the subjugation of the large mass of workers to the profit motive of a few wealthy individuals who made labour subservient to the machine. The first great critic of capitalism was Karl Marx who pointed out that

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4. Bert F. Hoselitz, "Capitalism" in *Grolier Universal Encyclopedia*, vol. 2., P.459.

capitalism was not a natural form of organization. Though it promoted productivity, growth did not occur at a uniform rate; there were periodic setbacks. It was a form of social interaction, exploitation of the workers by the rich. German sociologist Max Weber tried to show that the capitalist spirit of rationality in economic matters was rooted in the Protestant ethic, especially the religious doctrines of John Calvin who had stressed innerworldly asceticism. From this arose an economic mentality willing to take risks and acquisitiveness as the goal of productive activity.

### **Modernity and the Enlightenment**

The most drastic change effected by the second millennium was in the radical break with the Graeco-Scholastic philosophical mindset that had attached special importance to natures and essences of things and attended very little to actual human experience. With the rise in prestige of the empirical sciences, lived experience of the world became the focus of human thought. For Rene Descartes, Leibnitz and others clarity and distinction of ideas were the criteria for truth. Of the two poles of human knowledge, logical consistency of ideas about the object out there and the accuracy of details in length, breadth, thickness and duration, the latter gained priority. So the concern was to establish religion and philosophy on a par with the empirical sciences. Descartes took refuge in the certainty of the self-consciousness of thought and tried to derive all truth from the basic fact: "Cogito, ergo sum: I think, so I am." Even the existence of God had to be argued from the idea of the most perfect Being, which actually had to exist lest it should be less perfect than the little ant that actually existed. For Descartes the essence of material things was extension. Leibniz, on the other hand, thought that it was force and conceived the world as a cluster of infinite number of monads set in a pre-established harmony by God. Since such empirical certainty was impossible regarding rational truth, Emmanuel Kant removed philosophy completely from the field of experience and claimed to derive all truth by an a-priori analysis of reason and judgement. David Hume, Diderot and others completely despaired of reaching absolute certainty in such matters. Hence the important sources of "enlightened" ideas included British empiricism, French humanism, rationalism and skepticism. Kant posed the question: "What is Enlightenment?" and answered it by saying that it was man's emergence from "his self-imposed nonage", namely coming to maturity of the human mind.

This period, which called itself 'Modern', presumed that the human mind could resolve all problems by patient research sooner or later. It set out on a critical examination of previously accepted principles and

authorities, whether in politics, religion or science. There was optimism in the sense of a belief in unlimited secular progress with the conviction that human race was infinitely perfectible through improved education and the amelioration of the physical and social environment. In England the Age of Reason tended to complacency and support of the status quo gained through the Reformation. In France on the other hand it led to an increasing criticism of absolute monarchy, class privileges, censorship, legal arbitrariness and injustice, corruption and inefficiency in government. This new move led by people like Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau and others led to the French Revolution, and the Declaration of Independence in America.

There was a general breakdown of morality. Since no absolute principles were available in the absence of any solid metaphysics, all practical rules of moral behaviour had to be derived from blind religious faith, or from a presumed principle of freedom, a *laissez faire* outlook and utilitarianism based on the principle of '*noblesse oblige*'. The simple fact behind the obsolescence of traditional morality was that it was to a great extent based on the patriarchal system and the more or less static nature of the social order. Church was very much identified with the hierarchy and was supposed to be present in its own instructions, rules and regulations than in the Gospel.

The Church's response to this critical reaction to its tradition was to strengthen its grip on the consciences of people as individuals instilling in them a fear of hell and damnation. Pope Innocent III in the Council of Lateran IV in 1215 imposed on all individual members of the Church the obligation of 'Easter duties' that each one had to confess to the priest all one's sins at least once a year, that is at Easter time. Forty years after that council Thomas Aquinas stated that what was important for the penitent was to present himself to the priest as to a physician and confess all the serious sins he could remember; completeness of confession was more medicinal than juridical, since a physician needed to know all the ailments in order to treat a patient efficiently<sup>5</sup>. But the Council of Trent in its eagerness to counter the "faith alone" slogan of the Reformers avoided speaking about faith and its fruits and reaffirmed the juridical role of the priest as a judge. It stated that he had to know all the circumstances of the sin, its species and number in order to pronounce an appropriate judgement. Moral theology as a separate discipline arose from the post-Tridentine concern to enforce moral laws. In the aftermath of Lateran IV Raymond Penaforte complained that many priests had the power but not the knowledge, to remedy which situation he himself composed a *Summa*

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5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol. Supplement*, q6, a.3 and ad 3m

of Cases, which remained a standard manual of moral theology for a long time.

In reacting in a one-sided manner to Luther's denial of the authority of the Church, the church leaders unwittingly accepted what was the most dangerous element of his whole system, namely, extreme individualism and a complete distrust of the individual human being alleging his total corruption through sin. A moral theology geared to the practice of confession naturally generated a preoccupation with sin, a concentration on the individual and an obsession with law. As John Mahoney remarks, "It was the Church's growing tradition of moral theology which was itself heavily responsible for increasing men's weakness and moral apprehension, with the strong sense of sin and guilt which it so thoroughly stove to inculcate or reinforce, and the humiliation and punishment with which it drove its message home."<sup>6</sup> This investigation into the circumstances regarding the nature and number of grave sins, reflects a mentality in which objective morality seems to predominate over the subject's perception of what and why one was doing. It tends to instill or increase a pervasive sense of self-mistrust of the individual and a gloomy view of the human soul bent on doing evil than good. This approach isolates a person in one's individual self, with very little emphasis on interpersonal relations, common endeavours and collective responsibility.

### Post-Modernity

The Modern period by its inner logic came to its own undoing... Making man's own lived experience the ultimate criterion, it came to realize that it had no validity of its own. Hegel thought that he could invent God by the dynamism of human consciousness, and the obvious conclusion, as Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) pointed out, was that God would be nothing but a projection of man's own awareness of his infinity. Since no transcendent entity could be postulated, metaphysics itself became irrelevant. Whitehead's *Process and Reality* was the last great effort toward a universal reality in which all things fit<sup>7</sup>. The followers of Enlightenment had to admit that Science itself keeps moving and opens new vistas. Clash of relativity and quantum theory created a crisis in science. Principles of verification and falsifiability have application only in very limited cases. Today functions of the smallest particles are understood in terms of statistical probability

6. John Mahoney, *The Making of Moral Theology, A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, p28

7. Cf. Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, Wheaton IL. Theosophical Publishing House, 1992, p. xii.

since the very means like light that we use to measure the sub-atomic field can distort the data. The unified field theory, which Einstein hoped for, is long in coming and probably it needs another paradigm shift. Science and technology are not as expected always leading to progress but often to destruction. Hence the presumptions and assumptions of Modernity are generally abandoned, and determinism has waned as a prevailing principle<sup>8</sup>. The concept of objective truth itself is generally abandoned.

Kenneth Gergen claims: "Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction or reconstruction... Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony and ultimately the playful probing of another reality"<sup>9</sup>. Science and religion seem to have reached an alliance to be investigators and interpreters of a world we create in our attempt to discover those patterns of which it is most patient. So post-modernity must seem most conducive to theologizing. The creation of all things by God out of nothing, which is the foundation of all theology, and the "Big Bang theory" to explain the origin of the universe seem to have great affinity. In fact, physic's delving into the depths of the material reality beyond all that we can see and touch is an indication that there are other depths beyond matter itself.

One cannot, however, ignore the threat of individualism, which looms large on the horizon of the third millennium. Modern epoch has been least hospitable to religion and theology, both of which it has consigned to the private realm, where opinion not knowledge reigns supreme<sup>10</sup>. Today the ethos of individualism has mostly won. Against the all-embracing power of governments most humans want to secure their own material betterment and of their immediate family. Aid Agencies report a drop in their revenue. Books on spirituality focus on our feelings and how to get in touch with them. Counselling has become a boom industry. Privatization encroaches daily on the fabric of public life. The following of Jesus is limited to the part of his message relating to personal behaviour, with focus on hidden life of prayer and cultivation of interior life.

On the other hand, Jesus' disciples are called to a life-style completely opposed to the privatized, consumeristic ethics exploitative both of natural resources as well as of the poor who are considered

8. Cf. Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, New York: Basic Books, 1991 p.111; Langdon Gilkey, *Nature, Reality and the Sacred*, Minneapolis, MN. Fortress Press, 1993, p.25.

9. Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, p. 12.

10. Cf. Linell E. Cady, "Resisting the Postmodern Turn: Theology and Contextualization" In Sheila G. Devaney (ed.) *Theology at the End of Modernity* Philadelphia PA: Trinity Press 1991 p.81

expendable. As all the four evangelists report the miracle of the multiplication of bread. When Jesus learns that John the Baptist is beheaded by Herod, he takes his disciples out to a deserted place. But large crowds of people follow him there. He spends the whole day teaching them and healing the sick and when evening comes gives them a sumptuous meal of bread and fish, the poor man's banquet. It was reminiscent of Moses feeding the people in the desert with Manna, and further pointed towards the Eucharistic banquet which he promised them. Jesus is a hero not like Robinhood and El Cid, but rather an anti-hero showing forth the power of works relationally. He empowered people in their own self-becoming. Vatican Council II moved away from the purely abstract doctrinal definitions of the past to an emphasis on concrete human experience of today. Though it still retains a great deal of the outsider's view people's joys and sorrows, struggles and victories, it has shown that any relevant theology has to be created from the midst of our contemporary experience. The core of Vatican II's teaching is the ecclesiology of communion rooted in the Trinitarian mystery of the Godhead opened to us by Jesus. As Carter Heyward puts it: "In the beginning was the relation, and in the relation is the power that creates the world, through us, and with us, you and I, you and we, and none of us alone."<sup>11</sup>

### Conclusion: Pointers to the Third Millennium

If one is looking for signs indicating how the third millennium is shaping up the spirit of this Post-Modern era it presents a forward-looking outlook. Though today the major organized religions are losing ground with the people the great many popular religious movements appearing in all parts of the world show that religion itself is becoming more popular. For many who have lost faith in God Jesus continues to be a fascinating religious figure. During his life-time he was not a hero like Robinhood or El Cid, but rather an anti-hero who showed that redemptive power worked relationally. He empowered people in their own self-becoming. The great many base communities springing up in all parts of the world as the basic religious unit is an indication that people look for fellowship and experience in religion rather than mere external ceremony and abstract doctrine.

Even the women's movement and clamour for the ordination of women as priests represent a call for a radical rethinking of discipleship. Women stepping into the shoes of male priests will not solve the problem. Ours at present is a patriarchal, masculine, rigid religious structure. What is called for is greater mutuality, caring and maternal

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11. Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God*, Washington DC, 1980, p. 172.

concern for all people. So there is a definite shift of emphasis from the one divine Person of Christ in two natures to the redeeming dynamic he sets in motion. Against the structure of sin which is holding humanity in slavery there is a structure of grace which brings freedom and creative forward movement. Christ, the God-made-man is a concrete universal, a cosmic Christ, an ecological Christ who brings all things under his headship and demands that this world should be made hospitable to all God's children. Jesus' disciples are called to a lifestyle completely opposed to the privatized, consumeristic ethics exploitative both of the planet's resources and of the poor who are generally deemed expendable. Mysticism itself is not the private privilege of an elite but the vocation of all and the rootedness of the entire people in the one God in whom all live, move and have their being.

Seven Pillars of an Indian Christian Theology! With the emergence of contemporary thinking certain elements of Christian faith have gained prominence. The first point is that theology is not primarily a search for an ontology of God for the human, but rather an anthropology of the human for God. As Vatican II has clearly stated in its document on World Religions: what unites all religions is their search for the existential questions of the human, like human origin, final goal and meaning of suffering.

Secondly there appears the unity of the divine economy for the salvation of all human beings. Jesus Christ is not a monopoly of Christians nor Buddha of the Buddhists. All religious founders and their messages are the common heritage of all humans, though the specific contributions and demands of one religion may be radically different from those of others.

A third fact is the interrelationship of different religions. No religion originated in a vacuum. Buddhism arose in reaction to Hinduism and Christianity was originally a reform movement in Judaism. The personalist pluralism of Christian conception of the Godhead has to be seen in tension with the non-dualism of Advaita and the emptiness doctrine of Buddhism.

Fourthly, a natural consequence of this interdependence of religions is the primacy of the divine gift of faith freely given to all human beings. Though it is the faith of the Church that is shared by all individual members, the Church itself is a celebration of the faith received by each individual from the Spirit of God. Religions only try to interpret this basic divine gift of faith.

A fifth fundamental point of theology is the primary importance of the human consciousness of Jesus! Though he is ontologically the Son of God, the man Jesus had to realize that divine sonship through

faith and to learn obedience. Hence the concern of theology is not God "becoming" human as if it were some change in God, but the change it effected in humanity by the personal stamp of the Logos and the sanctifying activity of the Spirit in Jesus who grew in age, knowledge and wisdom.

Hence the fundamental point of contact among all religions is the Scriptures, recognized by all as the work of the Spirit, word of God in the words of the human.

Finally the scope of Christian missions is not the establishment and growth of the Church but the realization of God's kingdom. Jesus the Son of God is that kingdom and religions including the Church only his sacrament?

**San Thome Dialogue Centre**  
Kanyakumari.

# **The Dominance of Love in Second Millennial Christian Mysticism**

**Wayne Teasdale**

The author shows how mysticism born of Eastern and Platonic intellectualism and intuitive experience transformed itself during the second millennium into a mysticism of love.

If we wish to acquire some sense of where Christian spirituality or mysticism will go in the future, in what direction it will develop, it will be useful to look at where it has been during the second millennium of the Gospel. In this way, we will discern what has a relatively permanent value in Christian mysticism, and what may only be a phase or fad in the spiritual lives of certain members of the tradition. When we identify some element as having a permanent value for our tradition, we can then predict that it will also assume a place in the Christian mysticism of the third millennium.

The careful study of the last thousand years in Christian spirituality clearly indicates the importance of love as the primary focus in the writings of so many contemplative sages, or mystics in the tradition. Since this is true, we will explore this theme, and others, in an historical sketch that highlights the most significant figures. Before we pursue this course, however, it would be beneficial to our efforts here to very briefly consider what preceded the emphasis on love in the first millennium of the Christian era.

## **The First Millennium**

From the Apostolic Age of the first century to the Desert Fathers in the fourth century; the ideal was martyrdom, and its total identification with Christ. This gave way to Christian Neo-Platonic spirituality, often within a liturgical context, and the spiritual humanism of the Desert Fathers. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine are giants in the former, while Anthony of Egypt, the father of Christian monasticism, Macarius, John Cassian, and Evagrius Ponticus are prominent in the latter movement. What characterized the spirituality of the Desert tradition was its emphasis on a gospel based kind of humanism that placed great stress on non-judgment, acceptance,

generosity, charity, and bearing one another's burdens. These hardy souls pursued an intense form of contemplation in what they called fiery prayer in remote places where their solitude was assured. Christian Neo-Platonic mysticism drew attention to the role of the intellect in relationship to God, and Augustine developed in this regard, an introspective, or soul mysticism. St. Benedict emerged in the fifth century, and became the father or source of western monasticism in Latin Christianity with its focus on choral prayer and *lectio divina*, the path of contemplation using sacred texts. More on this below.

The great authority in the spiritual lives of the Orthodox and Catholic churches for twelve centuries was the obscure, sixth century Syrian monk, Pseudo-Dionysius, who though in the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition, formulated a unique type of speculative mysticism in his *Divine Names*, *Celestial Hierarchy*, and *Mystical Theology*. This form of contemplative mysticism firmly fixed the apophatic, or negative theology of his celebrated predecessor, Gregory of Nyssa, especially as seen in his *Life of Moses*, which demonstrated the way to God through transcendence of the senses and the mind in the ecstatic experience. We can know God through union, but it gives us an incomprehensible wisdom that cannot be grasped by reason or adequately expressed in language. Dionysian apophatism has remained a permanent teaching and method ever since.

John Scotus Eriuga, the Irish thinker and scholar, translated the works of Dionysius from Greek into Latin in the ninth century. The event greatly stimulated the growth of mysticism in the Catholic church, and the evolution of a distinct Latin tradition of the inner life. In the early centuries of the second millennium, there were three streams that predominated in the west, and these were the Benedictine tradition, Dionysian Neoplatonism, and Augustinianism, which was also a Neoplatonist form, with its profound understanding of the inner way of soul mysticism, an introspective form that cleared a path to the Divine One through the inner workings of the person, or in the depths of the soul itself, a kind of psychological spirituality.

### **The Middle Ages**

Anselm of Canterbury, a Benedictine, was decisively in the Augustinian contemplative tradition, and he was able to pass this impulse on to the Middle Ages. The most influential forces, however, for the formation of the subsequent tradition with its focus on the role of love or affectivity in Christian mysticism, were the Cistercians and Victorines, particularly the twelfth century figures Bernard of Clairvaux and Richard of St. Victor. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and Richard's *Benjamin Major* firmly guided Christian mysticism in the direction of affectivity. This event was to prove a watershed in the

history of Christian contemplation because it ushered in the bridal mysticism so essential for the ages to follow. With this turn, the primacy of love became fixed in the Christian tradition.

Between the twelfth, fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and their unfolding of affective mysticism, and really alongside of it, the Franciscan vision of cosmic mysticism emerged. Francis of Assisi and Bonaventure revealed a vision of the path to the Divine through the natural world itself, and this approach has been the inspiration behind so much art after the time of the poverello. Both of these great mystic saints, and a number of their followers, had a deep understanding of natural and supernatural contemplation in relation to the cosmos and in all of the surrounding reality of nature. Although these two Franciscan sages were great love mystics, they were also contemplatives of nature mysticism. It must also be observed that Bonaventure himself in writing his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (*The Soul's Journey into God*), produced a map of all the paths to the Divine known in the Middle Ages, including the ecstatic way of passing over into God through love.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw the extraordinary explosion of Rhenish mysticism with the great speculative mystics Eckhart, Tauler, Suso and Ruysbroeck. These contemplative figures were fully formed mystic masters who also possessed a gift for metaphysical thought. Eckhart and Ruysbroeck in particular developed these insights in relation to their mystical experience and realization. Their spirituality emphasized the role of the intellect or knowledge in the spiritual journey, and this is an important parallel trend in Christian mysticism. Like Pseudo-Dionysius before them, they were concerned with the transcendent ground in the Godhead itself, but this was not to be the dominant school in Christian spirituality.

In the fourteenth century we see a return to the earlier innovation of the twelfth century; the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, probably an English Carthusian, was to unite the love mysticism of the twelfth century with the apophatism of Dionysius. His book became a manual for budding contemplatives, and is still widely popular today. The tradition of affectivity, of love mysticism, drew heavily on these sources, and bridal mysticism flowered with the Spanish Carmelites in the sixteenth century, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. This bridal image was powerfully developed by Bernard himself as a way to express the intimacy of the soul's union with God.

### **Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross**

These two spiritual teachers, who led an important reform movement in their Carmelite order in their century, have had and continue to have an enormous influence on the mystical life of the Church, and not

simply among contemplatives in religious orders. Their mystical doctrine, based as it is on intense inner experience, is eminently practical, theologically sound, complete, and expressed in the intimate language of bridal metaphors. Theirs is a mysticism of love and intimacy with the Divine. Although there is knowledge of God in the process, and although the *via negativa*, or apophatic theology is present as part of the inner journey, their contemplative process is about the love that exists between the Divine and the human, the person who surrenders to God's grace, or that of the Beloved.

Teresa of Avila speaks at length about the degrees of union with the Divine. Her discourses on the nature of this union are usually in relation to love and expressed within the context of the degrees of contemplative, or mystical prayer. Both she and John of the Cross detail the stable mystical union known as the spiritual marriage. The unitive life is a spiritual marriage: it is an unbroken bond of profound affection between the soul as the Bride and God as the Bridegroom or the Lover and the Beloved; their bond is inseparable.

To make this point clear, Teresa has recourse to the metaphors of water and light streaming through the windows – images and metaphors common to John of the Cross as well. She tells us:

In the spiritual marriage, the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river... Or, like the bright light entering a room through two different windows; although the streams of light are separate when entering the room, they become one<sup>1</sup>.

Teresa affirms that divine union overcomes our sense of separation – a normal feeling in the human condition – by this perfect divine love, the love that Jesus taught his disciples, the binding force of his unity with them and with his Father. A union of love necessarily involves more than one; it means that at least two are so joined. Teresa refers to the essential obscurity and mystery of mystical union: "The secret union takes place in the very interior center of the soul, which must be where God Himself is, and in my opinion there is no need of any door for Him to enter."<sup>2</sup> There, in that secret interior chamber, God is loving and giving himself to the person.

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1. Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio, 2 vols. (Washington, DC; ICS Pub.), vol. 2, *The Interior Castle*, 7:2, p. 434. For a good history of Christian Spirituality see, Bernard McGinn's series, *The Presence of God: A History of Christian Mysticism, Foundations* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), *Growth* (1994), and *Flowering* (1998).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

John of the Cross also defines contemplation in terms of this obscure or hidden love: "Contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love."<sup>3</sup> Here he is referring to infused contemplation, which is the beginning of the unitive life. It is very difficult to attain the spiritual or mystical marriage, but certainly not impossible, and the Spirit wills to give it to everyone. Considerable suffering is endured, a suffering that purifies the self before a permanent state of union with God comes. This suffering is what he calls the dark nights of sense and spirit in which we are inwardly liberated by God from obtaining satisfaction from the sensory level of experience and our own former self-preoccupation. Alluding to this suffering and the difficulty of achieving divine union, he says: "One cannot reach this union without remarkable purity, and this purity is unattainable without vigorous mortification and nakedness regarding creatures."<sup>4</sup> There has to be total focus, a single minded intention for the Divine alone. Such is the nature of true purity of heart.

### Lectio Divina

The monastic tradition gave us the spiritual practice of lectio divina, which literally means "divine reading" (Lectio Divina). It is a method to facilitate the growth of contemplation, and it has proved to be very durable for more than fifteen hundred years in Christianity. It is quite popular with lay people across Christian communions who practice Centering Prayer, a form of contemplative meditation, which we will look at in the next section.

Lectio divina as a method of contemplation, has four stages: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. These stages go on each we do *lectio*. In *lectio*, the first stage, a scriptural text, or some other sacred work, is taken up, and a few passages, or perhaps only one brief passage is lowly read; it is read for inspiration, or imput to prayer, not for information. After some minutes reading, we put the book aside, and enter the second stage, that of *meditatio*, or what is better called reflection, so as not to confuse it with the connotation of meditation in our age. This reflective activity is not analysis, but an intuitive pondering of something that struck us in reading. After some reflection, we spontaneously enter the third stage, that of *oratio*, or affective prayer in which our hearts and feelings are engaged in relation to God. We are experiencing movements of the will toward the Divine. As these

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3. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans, Kieran Kavanaugh and Othio Rodriguez (Washington DC:ICS Pub., 1973), *The Dark Night of the Soul*, bk. 1, ch. 10, 6, p.318.

4. *Ibid* Bk 2. ch.24., Sect. 49., Coll. Wks., P.388.

become intense and express themselves, we enter the fourth stage of *contemplatio*, or rest in God. This is a simple method, but it has been found to be effective in leading people into the fullness of contemplative experience.

### Christian Hermeticism

Hermeticism is an obscure but very significant tradition; it has existed for at least 2,500 years, and claims to be a universal tradition. Hermeticism is crystallized mysticism, or mysticism in which there is a certain degree of self-aware knowledge of ultimate levels of divine consciousness in the mystic himself/herself. It is vast respository of knowledge, wisdom and mystical realization across traditions, though it is a distinctively Christian system of spirituality and philosophy.

One of the most visionary books in the latter part of the 20th century is a work on Hermeticism by an anonymous author who was a Russian emigre to Paris who later became a Catholic. His book is called, *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*<sup>5</sup>. There are many reasons that could be adduced for the value of this great work, but the purpose for introducing it here is that Christian Hermeticism, at least in the view and experience of this anonymous author, offers another form of Christian mysticism that is profoundly self-aware, that produces a pervasive knowledge gained in mystical states of consciousness. This is what is meant by crystallized mysticism. This is an important development when we consider how much apophatism has dominated western spirituality since Pseudo-Dionysius. One can reasonably say that the Hermetic approach unites knowledge with love in the act of mystical union and its aftermath, which is a blissful knowing of what was experienced of the Divine in the union itself. It teaches methods of strengthening the capacity of the intellect to receive, allows a person to become truly universal within<sup>6</sup>. That of course is the mystic. The mystical life makes us inwardly free, liberating us from narrow-mindedness, exclusivism, and over dependence on the structures.

Monchanin, Abhishiktananda, and Bede Griffiths drunk deeply from the well of Indian mysticism. Theirs was a Christian mysticism, or contemplation in dialogue with Advaita Vedanta, which saw the task as integrating Advaita and the Mystery of the Trinity in the mystical life itself. Having said this, it must also be observed that Bede Griffiths' mysticism was steeped in Christian personalism, and relationship with the Divine through love; this love was a constant experiential

5. *Ibid.*

6. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 225-6.

theme of Bede's. When he was recovering from a stroke in the spring of 1991, he wrote to me and said: "I find myself in the Void, but the Void is totally saturated with love". With this statement, Bede had put his finger on the place of integration of Buddhism and Christianity. With these figures, as with Merton, we find a Christian mysticism learning from other traditions, and other traditions learning from us. More than a question of inculcation, these pioneers of the Spirit were creating a hybrid reality in themselves.

With Thomas Keating, who was the Trappist abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, MA for twenty years, we discover a giant of Christian mystical wisdom. This man has achieved so much: the creation of Contemplative Outreach in order to teach contemplative prayer, or Centering Prayer to the people all around the world, the founding of the Snowmass Conference, an interreligious organization of fifteen members, each representing a great world religion, and each a spiritual master in their own tradition, and dialogues with Buddhists at the Naropa Institute, a Tibetan Buddhist graduate school in Boulder, Colorado. He has participated in hundreds of other dialogues over the years; written a number of books, and with the Snowmass Conference, has formulated the Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding, or eight points all the religions agree on<sup>7</sup> These Guidelines concern primarily the nature of Ultimate reality and our relationship with it.

Having known Abbot Thomas since my undergraduate days, it is no exaggeration to say that he is one of the most significant voices in the history of Christian mysticism. Thomas gives us not simply a method of contemplation, that is, Centering Prayer, as it is called, but a sound conceptual/theological teaching on the nature of the contemplative process, all the stages it entails, the fruits in our lives, and a mature understanding of the psychological foundation necessary for a healthy spiritual journey<sup>8</sup>. I have always felt the pull of an extraordinary holiness from this spiritual genius.

His mysticism is thoroughly of the love variety, one that is on an inevitable inner journey to divine intimacy and the transformation it brings. Contemplative prayer as Centering Prayer is the crux of breakthroughs and the change into greater and greater degrees of

7. Thomas Keating, "Guidelines for Interreligious Understanding: Points of Agreement". *A Source Book for Earth's Community of Religions*, ed. Joal Beversluis (Grand Rapids, CoNexus Press, 1995), p. 148.
8. His most important books are; *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1986), *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1992), and his masterpiece, *Intimacy with God* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

intimacy with God and transformation into divine love itself. This form of Christian mystical life has as its aim identification with the Divine's infinite generosity and sensitivity, and is in essential harmony with the preceding tradition.

### Christian Mysticism in the Interspiritual Age

We have seen how our tradition in the second millennium of the Gospel was animated by the goal of intimacy with the Divine in the mystical union of love, and not by an emphasis on knowledge of the Source. In the last decades of this century, and now as we enter the third millennium, it is becoming clear that Christianity's future is bound up with its relationships with the other traditions of the mystical life. The Interspiritual Age is here, and the next Christian millennium will be one in which the mystical insights of our tradition will be added to the mix of others towards an emerging universal tradition<sup>9</sup>.

During his long life, Bede Griffiths often spoke of the task of the Church in our age, and he defined that task as one of careful assimilation of the spiritual, moral, psychological and intellectual treasures of the east and the other cultures. Christianity has a genius for assimilation, and this was fully operative during the early centuries of the Church. And yet, for this assimilative function to be effective in our time and the ages to come, the Church must avoid a theology of reaction; it must open itself up to all that the Spirit wishes to give her. The grain of wheat must die, and be buried in the earth, and from its sacrifice a whole new vision will be born.

The Church must become a matrix of spirituality and interfaith encounter. She can evolve into this newer, larger vision if she will trust herself and her innate capacity to reconcile all truths within herself. She can welcome all faiths in her arms; give them a home in her hails, and listen to their voices, honoring them. Through the interfaith movement, the Church and the other traditions are discovering the bonds of genuine community, and it is stronger, more urgent than the old exclusivism. Community among the traditions makes intermysticism and interspirituality possible, and these name the phenomenon of learning from and sharing with the other traditions. Thus, Christian mysticism in the Interspiritual Age is one that acquires new insights, methods and experiences, and puts them in service to

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9. I have developed insights about the nature of interspirituality and intermysticism in an article and a book. See "The Interspiritual Age: Practical Mysticism for the Third Millennium", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 37, 1, Winter 1997, and in *The Mystic Heart: The Discovery of a Universal Mysticism in the World's Religions* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999).

the inner growth of persons. It is a mysticism in process of further formation, ever assuming new forms, but always with the same work: the transformation of the human and our society.

I have not said anything in this article about all the other forms of spirituality in Christianity that emanate from the creativity of very active saints. i.e., Ignatius of Loyola, Dominic, Vincent De Paul, and John Bosco, to name a few, because I've tried to focus on the purely mystical tradition. What this deeply rich and valuable tradition has to offer in the third millennium and the ages to come after are two inestimable treasures: its love mysticism and its apophatism. These are enduring achievements in the contemplative wisdom of the Church, and thus they add to the larger picture of intermystical wisdom which is now dawning on the horizon.

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# **Development of Biblical Studies in the Second Millennium: Historical Moments and Trend-setting Shifts**

**Augustine Mulloor**

Scripture the word of God in human words is the fundamental point of contact among religions. The 2nd millennium of Christianity has seen a definite shift from an impersonal view of Scripture to an understanding of its genuine meaning through various forms of historical and textual criticism.

## **Introduction**

To summarise the developments in biblical studies during a millennium in an article like this is equal to venturing on the impossible. No one can deny the fact that here we are concerned about a millennium which has witnessed an enormously vast, revolutionary and eventful development in the field of Bible. If the whole millennium is characterised as eventful; its second half, more precisely, the last two centuries have witnessed an epoch-making growth of the biblical research and studies in length and breadth, depth and height with far reaching consequences and wide-ranging implications for faith life. Hence, all that we would like to do in this article is to skim through the pages of second millennium biblical history and to make a panoramic vision by spotlighting the historical moments and trend-setting shifts. We begin with the medieval age and pass on to the reformation period and then to renaissance and post-renaissance period. Before concluding, we take note of the official reactions and responses to the new developments and trends from the Church.

Being on the threshold of the third millennium, looking back to the beginnings of the second millennium, one realizes that the difference is tremendous equalling the one between a seed and a tree. This awareness drives home to us the nature of the challenge that the church faces today in relation to biblical studies and of the new dimensions this challenge will take in the coming millennium.

### **1. Medieval period**

That the Latin Vulgate was the “set text” in the theological faculties

and universities throughout the middle ages shows the limitations of the Biblical studies of this period. However, the scholars then had excellent authority to study the original texts. They knew that a correct text in the original language (*veritas in radice*) with the knowledge of the milieu could make big difference in the reading of a text and its understanding<sup>1</sup>. In this period the most important scholarly developments took place outside the schools. Hence, the outstanding hebraists of 12th and 13th centuries like Nicholas Manjocoria, Andrew or St. Victor, Herbert of Bosham etc. did not hold university chairs<sup>2</sup>. Robert Grossteste was the best medieval Greek scholar<sup>3</sup>. Hugh of Victor was the source of inspiration for Hebrew studies at Paris<sup>4</sup>.

Early 14th century showed signs of revival of biblical studies which included scholarship. The council of Vienna in 1311-1312 decided that the departments of Greek and Oriental languages should be established in the important universities and schools of Christendom<sup>5</sup>. Nicholas of Lyra was a prominent figure and his *Postilla litteralis* took the place of earlier books. The period after Lyra can be characterized as a time of stunted growth<sup>6</sup>.

The monastic context of the Scripture reading and interpretation was a special trait of the medieval times. The context of prayer, the search for God and the particular spiritual needs of the community influenced the scriptural interpretation. In one way, it was the continuation of patristic theology. Rupert of Deutz and Bernard of Clairvaux are of special mention in relation to the salvation-historical interpretation<sup>7</sup>.

Coming to Scholasticism, the platonic categories replaced with the Aristotelian ones, there was a shift from contemplative approach to a more rational one, yet being faithful to the patristic ways of interpreting the Scripture. An independent theologian in the 13th century began to be called "Magister in Sacra Pagina". The number of Biblical manuscripts increased explosively. Stephen Langton who divided the Biblical text into chapters belongs to this period<sup>8</sup>.

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1. G.W.H. Lampe (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2, Cambridge, 1969, p. 218.
2. *Ibid.* p. 216. 3. *Ibid.* p. 217.
4. *Ibid.* See also: R.E. Brown etc., "Hermeneutics", in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore, 1991, p. 1155.
5. G.W.H. Lampe (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 218.
6. *Ibid.* p. 219.
7. P. Valkenberg, "Readers of Scripture and hearers of the word in the Medieval church", in: *Concilium* (1991/1) p. 48.
8. *Ibid.* 50. See also: G.W.H. Lampe (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 206.

St. Thomas Aquinas integrated into his philosophy the practice of that time. The literal sense was identified as the full original meaning of the sacred author as expressed in the whole message meant for the readers both present and future<sup>9</sup>. Having profited from the favourable condition for scholarly study of Scripture, working as commentator on Scripture did make a difference in the theological reflection of St. Thomas<sup>10</sup>. His theology is really biblical theology.

Finally as part of the medieval biblical developments, the name Erasmus should be mentioned as a fine example of the “revival of traditional patristic culture, made new again so that Scripture too should be rediscovered... critical philology has to be perfected and used for historical understanding of ancient texts promoting the return to the sources”<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. Reformation Period

Reformation period is the period of the Bible. They belong together. The centrality of Bible was expressed in three different ways: translations of the Bible, the function of the Bible in the reformation theology and the use of the Bible in preaching and liturgy<sup>12</sup>. “Sola Scriptura” being the principle of protestant reformers, led by Luther, had the predecessors in William of Occam and Nicolo di Tudeschi in the denial of the authority of the Church. During this period efforts were made to make the original text available and to produce standard commentary. The catholic reform retorted that the church must be the Lord and interpreter of the Scripture because it is in the church that the Scripture took shape and was formed. The Council of Trent and the declaration on the Canon of the Bible are to be underscored as major events of this period<sup>13</sup>.

## 3. Renaissance, a Turning Point

Renaissance marks the turning point in the history of the biblical studies because it fostered and nurtured the interest in the study of the ancient languages, promoted the historical approach and witnessed the development of Archeology as an independent science. The experience of reading the biblical texts in the original languages, historical approach to the texts and the bulk of information about the

9. *Ibid.* p. 215.

10. P. Valkenberg, “Readers of Scripture and the hearers of the word in the Medieval church”, in: *Concilium* (1991/1) p.51.

11. G.W.H. Lampe (Ed.), *Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 2, Pp. 492-505.

12. C. Augustijn, “The sixteenth century reformers and the Bible” in *Concilium* (1991/1) p. 58f.

13. R.E. Brown etc., “Hermeneutics” in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1155.

original geographical and social background of the biblical texts from archeology revolutionized the biblical studies. The period is, hence, marked by the development of textual criticism and the sharpening of the debate about unique literal sense and spiritual, figurative, symbolic senses. As the scientific and critical approaches developed, the interpretation, while feeding on patristic traditions depended also on the renewal of rhetoric<sup>14</sup>. Radical changes on the rational and social levels realized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have catalysed the emergence of the historical-critical approach to the bible texts<sup>15</sup>. taking them like any other literary text and advocating an objective, uninvolved, dispassionate strict and rigorous method.

#### 4. Historical-critical method

It was the “Critical History of the Old Testament” of Richard Simon in 1678 that set the stage for the historical-critical method<sup>16</sup>. The aim of this method is to go back to the original form of the text and to its original meaning. It connotes, therefore, an approach that is philologically learned, critical as opposed to dogmatic, and devoted to scientific as against pre-critical interpretation and history, its main virtue being “resolute commitment to philological and historical evidence...”<sup>17</sup>. It presumed that the text can be approached in an objective manner, its meaning could be brought out unhindered by the pre-suppositions and contextual elements belonging to the interpreter. The reader or the interpreter remains away from the text and has a passive attitude and his function is, through critical analysis, to lead out (ex-ago) the meaning. Now, the original form and meaning of a text meant a very complex reality and much more complex a way was necessary to reach it. The text criticism was devoted to the determining of the original form of the text and the literary criticism by employing the philological and stylistic analysis attempts to establish the precise meaning of the text that is determined. Thus various disciplines are involved in this process.

14. J.R. Armogathe, “Biblical studies in the Eighteenth century: From the letter to the figure” in: *Concilium*, (1991/1), Pp. 69f.; H.E. Green.... (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 461f.
15. cfr. P. Hazard, *The European Mind (1680-1715)*, London 1953.
16. R. Simon had written: “Those profess and call themselves should be content to devote themselves exclusively to explaining the literal meaning of the authors and should disregard everything else that irrelevant to that purpose” cited by P. Hazard, see above. p. 182.
17. B.F. Meyer, “The challenges of Text and Reader to the Historical Critical Method” in: *Concilium* (1991/1) p.3.

## Form-criticism

H. Gunkel had already initiated this kind of research into the OT. This is a study on the pre-literary oral traditions. More than individual composers, here the typical conservative expressions articulated in various genres (Gattungen) developed in particular life-situations (Sitz im Leben) are subject of study. This demands a thorough literary approach and appreciation, study of the religious historical situation and of the extra-biblical parallel literature<sup>18</sup>. Concerning the OT H. Gunkel was followed by G. Von Rad, M. Noth, A. Alt etc.<sup>19</sup>.

Martin Dibelius stood on the threshold of a new epoch regarding the Gospel research when he said that the Gospels are collected material (Sammelgut). This was the beginning of the realization that there are many stages in the formation of the Gospel and that it is necessary to trace back the sociological conditioning and the literary history of the pre-gospel oral traditions. So form-criticism was concerned about this particular stage of the growth of the Gospel tradition<sup>20</sup>.

Thus three levels were distinguished in the process of formation and preservation of the Gospel materials: the Sitz im Leben of Jesus, the Sitz im Leben of the church and the Sitz im Leben of the Evangelist. K. L. Schmidt had already paved the way for M. Dibelius<sup>21</sup>. One of the most influential form critics is R. Bultmann. His contribution is to be set against the background of the quest for the historical Jesus<sup>22</sup>. Starting with H.S. Reimarus who distinguished between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, D. Strauss, F.C. Baur, J.B. Lightfoot, B.F. Westcott, A. Von Harnack are some of the main representatives of the quest for historical Jesus period, characterized by rationalism, historical scepticism, faith on historical growth and confusion regarding the period and order of the Gospels.

Bultmann following his master Herrmann considered that a historical basis will destroy one's faith because faith's object is belief and nothing else. Applying the principles which Gunkel applied to OT, to the NT Bultmann asked whether the narrations and words of Jesus in the Gospels are historical? According to him, what we have here is only

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18. J.S. Kselman etc., "Modern New Testament Criticism" in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1134.
19. cfr. H. Gunkel, *Genesis: Commentary*, 1901; *Legends of Genesis* (in: *Reden und Aufsatze*) 1931; See also: K. Koch, *Growth of the Biblical Tradition*, NY 1968.
20. J.S. Kselman etc. "Modern New Testament Criticism" p. 1137.
21. *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu*, 1919.
22. cfr. A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the historical Jesus*, London, 1953.

the articulation of the experience of the primitive community resulting from their encounter with Jesus. Hence regarding historicity he is very sceptical, since these narrations presuppose the very special life-situations of the community. So no life of Jesus can be written. After all our faith is not based on the historical Jesus, but on the experience of Jesus crystallized in the proclamation of the community. These life-situations include myths. Hence demythologization is the way to make the message understandable to the present situation.

Reactions to Bultmann came from all over, from the conservative German scholarship represented by K. Barth, O. Cullmann etc., from British scholarship represented by V. Taylor, R. H. Lightfoot, C. H. Dodd and from Bultmann's disciples themselves like E. Kasemann, E. Fuchs, G. Bornkamm, H. Conzelmann, J.M. Robinson, G. Ebeling etc. Joachim Jeremias initiated the studies in view of finding the historical basis of the Gospel narrations especially by identifying the Aramaic substratum of the sayings of Jesus which indicates the original *Sitz im Leben* and thus reaching as far as possible to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus<sup>23</sup>. M.N. Perrin followed him proposing the criteria for determining the authentic words of Jesus<sup>24</sup>. The research into the methods of teaching and transmitting the traditions in the Jewish culture opened up new vistas in the possibility of return to the historical situations and words and events<sup>25</sup>. Concerning the aramaic substratum of the Greek text studies were done especially by G. Dalman, C.C. Torrey, C.F. Burney and M. Black<sup>26</sup>.

### Redaction Criticism

Being dissatisfied with the results of form-criticism, as it could provide only a bulk of information about the text's past history and the process of its formation and as it would finally leave the text in the dissected form in pieces without answering the questions of the reader and his situation as a unitary and whole composition, scholars started concentrating on the function of the Evangelist, as redactor beyond being mere collectors of various traditions. Here the attention is shifted

23. The prayers of Jesus, London, 1984; The parables of Jesus, London 1981; The Eucharistic words of Jesus, London, 1964.
24. Rediscovering the teaching of Jesus, London, 1967.
25. Three names are important here: H. Riesenfeld, The Gospel tradition and its beginnings. A study in the limits of Formgeschichte, 1957; B. Gerhardsson, Tradition and Transmission in early Christianity, 1964; Memory and Manuscript, Upsala 1961; R. Riesener, Jesus der Lehrer, Tübingen, 1984.
26. G. Dalman, The words of Jesus, 1902; C.C. Torrey, The four Gospels, 1933; C.F. Burney, The aramaic origin of the fourth Gospel, 1922; M. Black, An aramaic approach to the Gospels and Acts, 1967.

from the *Sitz im Leben* of the church to the *Sitz im Leben* of the Evangelist or the Gospel. The object of study is the creative contribution in all its aspects given by the redactors to the Christian tradition which they transmit. This new approach was pushed into the field by G. Bornkamm through the article he wrote on the narration of the stilling of the storm in Mt 8: 18-27 articulating the theological motives behind the reworking of the received tradition and material<sup>27</sup>. Later this was applied to all the Gospels<sup>28</sup>. When the redaction criticism is seen from a wider angle, it should not be the study of the differences introduced by the redactor into the material he received and is transmitting but also of the reorganization of the materials part of the whole gospel considered a literary whole, a composition. In this sense redaction criticism can also be called composition criticism. The redaction-critical studies on the Gospels are to a great extent based on the two-source hypothesis. The numerous results of such studies, thus contribute to the probability of this hypothesis because for the contrary to be proved, all these results have to be reversed. Redaction criticism promoted the study of the communities to which originally the Gospels were addressed and the identification of their situation.

## 5. New Methods and Approaches

The inadequacy of historical-critical method for interpreting the biblical texts which are not only historical but also trans-historical was recognized soon<sup>29</sup>. However, all agreed that historical-critical method can not be an *aut... aut* but *et... et* because the diachronic approach promoted by such a method alone could safe-guard the historical dimension of the text and avoid the possible slipping into very subjective and superficial interpretations. Hence leaving aside the defective philosophical assumptions that were tacitly fused with this method, any discerning observer could distinguish the historical and philological methods. But the need to go beyond this method accepted with consensus.

The new approach that emerged recognized the principles of new hermeneutics and applied them to Bible. The attention was turned to literary criticism understanding the interpretation a dialogical process in which the questions like What is the subject matter or reference of

27. "The stilling of the storm in Matthew" in *Tradition and interpretation in Matthew*, London, 1982.

28. H. Conzelmann, *The theology of Luke*, 1960; W. Marxen, *Der Evangelist Markus*, 1957; W. Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel*, 1964.

29. cfr. G. Soares Prabhu, "The historical critical method" in: *Theologising in India*, Eds. M. Amaladoss etc., Bangalore, 1981, 314f.; See also. B.F. Meyer, as above; D.K. Mckim, *A guide to contemporary Hermeneutics*, '86, pp. 15-16.

the text? How does the text work to engage the reader? How does the subjectivity of the reader influence the process of interpretation? etc. become relevant<sup>30</sup>.

Rhetorical criticism commits itself to the study of the rhetorical features of the Scriptures and thus takes the reader beyond the literary and structural purpose of the text. What is said is to be understood on the basis of the rhetorical intention. It is the study of "use, of purpose pursued, targets hit or missed, practices illuminated for the sake not of knowledge but of farther (improved) practice"<sup>31</sup>. This is so because all the discourse is aimed at influencing a particular audience and reveal the context of both the author and the reader<sup>32</sup>.

Texts were approached narratively by narrative criticism in which attention is paid to the plot, characterization and the point of view taken by the narrator. The text engages the reader in its narrative world and in the system of values contained in it. This takes care of the narration in the informative level (as story of salvation) and in the performative level (as story for salvation) with existential appeal.

Structuralism or semiotic analysis views the text as structured or organized presentation of relationships between various elements based on fixed laws. The meaning of the text emerges in the process of understanding the meaning of the signs and their mutual relationships. So the analysis consists in establishing the network of relationships on the narrative level, discourse level or and semantic level<sup>33</sup>.

Closely connected with structuralism is the theory of Deconstructionism. The theory is very much linked to the name J. Derrida<sup>34</sup>. According to its view, "the text is simply the occasion to create new works of thought or art rather than something having an objective and attainable historic meaning"<sup>35</sup>. In other words, "the text is a bottomless series of references which never comes to rest in "real" or determinate referent"<sup>36</sup>. So the text itself subverts the very meaning it creates and leaves the indeterminacy complete.

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30. R.E. Brown etc., "Hermeneutics" in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1159; D.K. McKim, *A guide to contemporary Hermeneutics*, Pp. 15-16; I.H. Marshall, *New Testament Interpretation*, Exeter, 1979, Pp. 308f.; C.E. Braaten, "How new is the new Hermeneutic? in: *Theology Today XII* (1965) 218-235.
31. W. Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical criticism taking us?", in: *CBQ* 49 ('87) 449.
32. R.E. Brown etc., "Hermeneutics", in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1159.
33. R. Jacobson, "The structuralists and the Bible", in: *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, pp. 280f.
34. *Dissemination*, Chicago, 1981.
35. D.J. Harrington, "Biblical Hermeneutics in recent discussion: New Testament" in: *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, Pp. 14-15.
36. R.E. Brown, "Hermeneutics" in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1159.

Reader-Response criticism looks at the text not merely as a container of meaning which the reader passively takes in. The text is an index to meaning which must be actively and dynamically evoked, construed and articulated through the process of reading through the reader's resources. This approach is a summons to bring the text to semantic realization through the interaction by the reader. So the sociolect of the reader and the ideolect of the text are part of the process of that interaction in which the community and its conventions cannot be ignored. The dialogue, then, remains an open-ended affair<sup>37</sup>.

The approach based on "Wirkungsgeschichte" presupposes that a text cannot be fully understood today and received without taking into account the multiple effects that it has created in the course of time in all levels including art and literature<sup>38</sup>.

Sociological approach can mean two things: the study of the various questions concerning the social background of the biblical events and their narrations as studied by G. Theissen<sup>39</sup>; "the audience-oriented sociological criticism investigating reading as an essentially collective phenomenon in which the individual reader is part of a "reading-public" with particular socio-historical characteristics influencing interpretation"<sup>40</sup>.

Attempts have been made to approach biblical texts from the point of view of the principles of psychology<sup>41</sup>.

Liberationist reading of the biblical texts is one of the influential developments of this millennium. The texts are interpreted from the actual situation of poverty and injustice and in view of getting the stimulus for the liberative praxis in the concrete situation. In this context popular ways of reading the Bible as listening to God today with freedom, familiarity and fidelity have emerged<sup>42</sup>.

Linguistics is the latest influence on the files of biblical interpretation. The performative dimension of language is the burden of the discussion. According to this language theory, language is not merely saying or writing but doing or Act and it demands life transformation. Hence every biblical text is a model of praxis, containing not only a

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- 37. B.C. Lategan, "Current issues in Hermeneutical debate" in: *Neotestamentica* 18 (1984) 1-17.
- 38. A very good example is the commentary on Mt by U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus I*, Zürich 1985; II 1996.
- 39. J.S. Kselman, "Modern New Testament Criticism" in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1144.
- 40. R.E. Brown etc., "Hermeneutics" in: *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 1160. 41. E. Drewermann, *Das Markusevangelium*, I & II, Olten 1987/88.
- 42. cfr. C. Mesters, "Listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches", *Popular Interpretation of the Bible in Brazil*", in: *Concilium* (1991/1) 100-111.

communicative intention but also a pragmatic purpose. The process of interpretation should bring out, therefore, the communicative strategy employed by the author to lead the reader to the set pragmatic aim and identify the impulses emerging from the text for actual praxis<sup>43</sup>. So the interpretation should aim not only at the meaning of what is being said by the text but also at the function of what is being said.

Prof. Lentzen-Deis goes a step further, when he wishes to introduce "a dialogue about how to combine adequately and effectively scientific exegesis with pastoral praxis"<sup>44</sup>. The praxis that emerges from the reading of the Bible is identified as inter-culturation. "For pastoral reasons, for a better understanding of Bible in different cultures, and because of the recent developments of the exegetical method itself, it seems necessary to promote and extend further the methodological steps of the so called "historical criticism"..."<sup>45</sup>. "Historical science has discovered that an ancient text, for that matter, one in the Bible in particular, during the development of the tradition did acquire a new meaning when it came in contact with new situations. For this reason, we need to study the conditions according to which it is possible to have "a plurality of meaning" ... the message changes through the centuries, according to the needs of the hearers, since it can be understood differently from different points of view... This type of hermeneutics does not deny the fact that only the original and "historical" meaning of the scriptures is to be acknowledged as the "norm" for further interpretations in a strict theological sense. Here we speak rather of the process of Christian life which inspired and influenced afresh by the common experience of the people of God and by prophetic charisms"<sup>46</sup>. Ultimately Bible reading and interpretation leads to the formation of an inter-cultural community.

Feminist concerns are the point of departure for a feminist reading of the Bible. Such a reading is aimed at finding models – positive or counter - for upholding the feminist values and for fighting against the

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43. W. Egger, *Methodenlehre zum Neuen Testament*, Freiburg 1987; H. Frankernolle, *Biblische Handlungsanweisungen: Beispiele pragmatischer Exegese*, Mainz 1983; F. Lentzen-Deis, "Passionsbericht also Handlungsmodell?" in: K. Kertelege, (Ed.), *Der Prozess gegen Jesus*, Freiburg, 1988; A. Mulloor, *Jesus; Prayer of Praise*, Delhi, 1996.

44. F. Lentzen-Deis (Gen. Ed.), *Jesus in exegetical reflections and community experience*, (Reg. Ed. A. Mulloor), Delhi, 1997, p. xii.

45. A. Mulloor, *Jesus Prayer of Praise*, Delhi, 1996 p. xii.

46. F. Lentzen-Deis (Gen. Ed.); A. Mulloor (Reg. Ed); *Jesus in the exegetical reflections and community experience*, Delhi, 1997, pp. xv-xvi; cfr. also: F. Lentzen Deis, *Das Markusevangelium*, Stuttgart 1998; (Reg. Ed.) G. Pearl Dgrego, *The images of Jesus*, Bombay 1988; F. Lentzen-Deis, *Avances metodologicos de la exegesis para la praxis de hoy*, Calle 1990.

discriminations and exclusive attitudes. It identifies the role of women in salvation history and now targeting the praxis of emancipation<sup>47</sup>.

In India the biblists are overburdened with full time lectures in the over-crowded and understaffed theological faculties attached to the formation houses and hence are compelled by the situation to feel at home generally with the historical-critical method. However, some attempts have been notable in the desire for an Indian hermeneutics especially in the writings of George Soares Prabhu who opines about the historical-critical method's inadequacy thus; "A method fashioned to exact information is being used to interpret a text which aims at personal transformation of the reader through his response in faith. The method is thus incommensurate with the intention of the text"<sup>48</sup>. Hence he comes to the conclusion that this method is not enough for Indian situation and cultural and pastoral needs. It is ineffective because it being a method suitable for dealing with quantitative realities is applied to qualitative realities like the biblical texts. It is irrelevant because it seldom speaks to the actual needs of the community. It is ideologically loaded – as is evident from the situation in which it originated, namely, post-enlightenment western thought – and does not reflect the Indian values and concerns<sup>49</sup>. So he proposes the possibility of reading the Bible keeping the Indian concerns as the basis for the point of departure, namely, the commitment to the poor and the Indian inclusive, cosmocentric, symbolic and pragmatic world view<sup>50</sup>. But after his death, this movement has not found any or many committed echoes, especially on account of the special sociological situation that makes a committed asceticism of scholarship difficult.

The latest discussion in the biblical studies was centred on the historicity of the Gospels and of the person of Jesus, a reecho of the quest for the historical Jesus of the beginning of last century, now revived by the Jesus seminar scholars of the United States<sup>51</sup>. That the

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47. E.S. Fiorenza, "Toward a feminist biblical hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and liberation Theology", in: *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics*, pp. 358-381.

48. G. Soares-Prabhu, "The historical critical Method" in: *Theologising in India*, see above, p. 318.

49. B.C. Lategan, "Current issues in the hermeneutical debate", see above, p. 6.

50. G. Soares -Prabhu, "The historical critical method", see above; "A Biblical hermeneutic for India today" in: *Commitment and Conversion*; "Jesus and the poor, in: *Poverty In India* (Ed. J. Murickan), Bangalore, 1988; "From alienation to inculuration" in: *Bread and Breath*, Gujarat, 1991 etc.

51. J.D. Crossan, *Jesus, a revolutionary biography*, San Francisco 1994; R.W. Funk, *The five Gospels. The search for the authentic words of Jesus*; B.L. Mack, who wrote the NT, San Francisco, 1996; *The Lost Gospel*; M.J. Borg, *Jesus in contemporary scholarship; Jesus a new vision*, 1991; J. Duquesne, *Jesus, an unconventional Biography*, Missouri, 1997 etc.... cfr. *Jeevadharma*, XII/152 (1996)

Jesus reconstructed by these scholars is based on pretensions and prejudices is immediately sensed by serious scholars. The latest response to this is given by L.T. Johnson showing the right relationship between history, faith and tradition and thus projecting the image of Jesus in the Gospels<sup>52</sup>. A serious rethinking of the historical Jesus attempted through serious scholarship by J.P. Meier cannot be overlooked hereafter by any serious scholar of the New Testament<sup>53</sup>.

## 6. Official Biblical responses of the Church

It is relevant, at this juncture of our survey of the development of biblical studies in the 2nd millennium, to take note of the official responses of the church to the same. In the context of the protestant reformation, the council of Trent in 1546 had defined and declared the canon of the Bible. In the following period, however, much has not been done to promote biblical scholarship. But coming the crucial period of tremendous advancement of Biblical studies in the last two centuries the response of the church may be identified in the following decisions or documents.

- Pope Leo XIII wrote the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* in 1893.
- Pope Leo XIII founded the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1902 with the purpose of encouraging the catholic scholars in their study of the Bible, acting as clearing house of ideas and opinions, using all the new helps to exegesis, guarding against anything that would appear to go against the true sense of Scripture.
- In 1904 Pope Pius X empowered the Pontifical Biblical Commission to confer by examination the degrees of Licentiate and Doctorate in Scripture.
- Pope Pius X founded the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in 1909.
- The encyclical of Pope Benedict XV *Spiritus Paraclitus* in 1920.
- The decision of Pope Pius XI 1924 that the Scripture Professors in the seminaries should have at least the degree of Licentiate in Scripture either from Pontifical Biblical Commission or from Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- The encyclical of Pope Pius XII in 1943 *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.
- The document of Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1964: *Instruction on the historical Truth of the Gospels*.
- The dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council in 1965: *Dei Verbum*.

52. The real Jesus, San Francisco, 1997.

53. A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the historical Jesus, Vols. I & II, NY, 1991.

- The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1993: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.

### **Biblical Revolution of a Millennium**

We have been attempting a survey of the Biblical developments in the second millennium. This has evidenced the fact that it has been a very prosperous time for the biblical studies and hence to bring to focus all the most important moments of this revolutionary period is a herculean task. All that has been done in the preceding pages is just to enumerate the most important moments in the history of biblical scholarship especially from the angle of various methods and approaches. If a shift is identifiable in the reformation period, a major turning point happened with the renaissance, in the post-enlightenment period. With the emergence of the critical and historical approach, the burden of the interpretation was identified as the determination of the original meaning of the text in the most exact and possible way. In the exegesis of the classical sense this is equal to identifying the intention of the author. Historical method presupposed that this could be done in an "objective" manner, without allowing the situation of the interpreter enter into the process of interpretation, by elucidating the meaning of the text in a life-less and unconcerned manner. So the interpretation process was restricted to the clarification of the *Sitz im Leben* in a narrow sense, that is, the circumstances of the life and customs tradition handed down. That this could be done without any pre-understanding was questioned in the context of the development of the philosophy of understanding and communication. The diachronic approach employed in the historical study was replaced by the synchronic approach according to which the final form of the text was the medium of communication. The diachronic analysis was important in so far as it helped the illustration of the meaning of the text in its final form. So the text became the centre of attention.

Now, the further shift happened when the reader was considered an inevitable element in the process of interpretation and understanding. If the author was introducing a communication with his original readers through the text, the same text is now the medium for a new communication with the readers of today. Hence a reconstruction of the world of the original readers is not enough, but an awareness of the world and world-vision of the present readers is necessary. Hence a praxis-oriented intercultural dialogue between the text and the reader happens in the process of interpretation.

Here there is a shift from the understanding of the text as a historical text to the understanding of the text as message for today, from a logical definition of the text to a rhetorical definition. Parallelly, there is

the shift in the method of interpretation from diachronic to synchronic, from historical-critical to communicative. A further shift is notable in the focus on author or on text or on reader. The various disciplines and approaches that developed in this connection are not to be viewed as independent and isolated ways but as complementary to each other.

On another level, these developments may be synthesized as the movement of emphasis from the source to the message and to the reception representing the three stages in the text formation and handing over, namely, formation, preservation and transmission or reading. From the angle of the process of interpretation, the development can be summarized as the movement from historical to exegetical, to theological, to dialogical and to existential or pragmatic. In other words, the development has moved from history to meaning, to the encounter with God, to encounter with others and to the experience of existential transformation. And all these are finally the various moments of one process complementing each other and leading to further perfection.

The hope, therefore, is to be kept alive that further revolutionary developments in the Biblical studies will lead us, in the coming millennium to further perfection, namely to the formation of a still better universal community which is God-centered and other-oriented based on the values of love, justice and reconciliation. After all, that is the purpose of Biblical study. And Bible is an Absolute to be always interpreted, an everlasting, inexhaustible oracle to be always let to evoke new speech.

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# The Contributions of Advaita Vedanta to Indian Christian Theology in the Second Millennium

K.P. Aleaz

The greatest challenge and source of inspiration for Christianity in India is Advaita Vedanta. While critically viewing its impersonalism and aloofness from the actual World, a good few Christian theologians took a positive view of its genuine value. The author, Rev. Dr. K.P. Aleaz is Professor of Religions at Bishops College, 224 A.J.C. Bose Road, Calcutta - 700 017.

In this paper we adopted a descriptive – analytical method to study the original writings of the Christian thinkers who constructed theology in the context of Advaita Vedanta. The theologians whom we cover in the first section of this research are positive in their approach to Advaita Vedanta. For example Brahmapandit Upadhyaya, Carl Keller, K. Subba Rao, J.G. Arapura, R.V. De Smet and S.J. Samartha. They may be categorised under the Reception Model as they receive Advaita Vedantic thought totally in their endeavour to interpret Christian faith. In the theology of religions they can come under the school of either Pluralistic Inclusivism<sup>1</sup> or Pluralism<sup>2</sup>. The present author's modest efforts are also in the line of these theologians<sup>3</sup>. Then there is another group of theologians whom we study in the second section, who can be put under the Reinterpretation Model because they do not receive Advaita Vedanta as it is; Advaita Vedantic concepts are reinterpreted by these thinkers to make them 'Christian'<sup>4</sup>. P. Johanns, Mark Sunder Rao, Swami Abhishiktananda, Bede Griffiths, Raimundo Panikkar,

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1. Pluralistic Inclusivism inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive. cf. K.P. Aleaz, *Theology of Religions, Birmingham Papers and Other Essays*, Calcutta: Moumita, 1998, pp. 168-99.
2. Pluralism holds that other religions are equally salvific paths to the one God.
3. cf. K.P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramanas in Hindu Christian Epistemology*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1991; *An Indian Jesus from Sankara's Thought*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1997.
4. cf. K.P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta*, Delhi, ISPCK, 1996.

Sara Grant, and Vandana may belong to this group. In the theology of religions they come under the school of Inclusivism<sup>5</sup>, with the exception of Swami Abhishiktananda and Raimundo Panikkar who have tried to progress from Inclusivism to Pluralism to an extent. There are certain Indian Christian Theologians for example, P.D. Devanandan and Surjit Singh who are not in favour of Advaita Vedanta; they present the gospel of Jesus as an alternative to Advaita Vedanta and hence they may be grouped under the Rejection Model. We take note of them in the third section of this paper. They represent the Exclusivist school<sup>6</sup> in the theology of religions. Finally we end up in a few concluding observations.

### 1. The Christian Theologians who receive Advaita Vedanta

Under the Reception Model the contributions of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya to Indian Christology lie in his explanation of the second person of the Trinity as *Chit*. He interpreted the Son as *Chit* in the context of his interpretation of the Trinity as *Sat-chit-anandam*. It is the Upanisads and Sankara's writings which Upadhyaya takes as the basis for his explanation of this Vedantic concept. To speak of Brahman as *Sat-chit-anandam* means that Brahman knows Itself and from that self-knowledge proceeds Its eternal beatitude. Brahman is related of necessity only to the Infinite Image of Its own being, mirrored in the ocean of Its knowledge. This relation of Being (*Sat*) to Itself in self-knowledge (*Chit*) is one of perfect harmony, bliss (*Anandam*)<sup>7</sup>. Upadhyaya proclaims then that the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity is exactly the same as the Vedantic conception of Brahman as *Sat-chit-anandam* because in the Trinity the Father's knowledge is fully satisfied by the cognition of the Logos, the Infinite Image of His Being, begotten by thought and mirrored in the ocean of His substance and His love finds the fullest satisfaction in the boundless complacency with which He reposes on His Image and breathes forth the spirit of bliss. The knowing Self is the Father, the known Self or the self-begotten by His knowledge is the Son; and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of reciprocal love proceeding from the Father and the Son<sup>8</sup>.

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5. The Inclusivist approach affirms the salvific presence of God in other religions while still maintaining that one's own religious faith is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God.
6. In the opinion of the Exclusivist school, one's own religious faith is the sole criterion by which other faiths are understood and evaluated.
7. B. Upadhyaya, "A Vedantic Parable", *Sophia*, Vol. V. No. 8, Aug. 1898, P. 119; "Being", *Sophia*, Vol. 1, No. 7, July 28, 1900, p. 7; "Notes", *Sophia*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 23, 1900. p. 7.
8. B. Upadhyaya, "An exposition of Catholic Belief as compared with the Vedanta", *Sophia*, Vol. V, No. 1, Jan. 1898, p. 11; "Our newcanticle", *Sophia*, Vol. V, No.

Upadhyaya would point out that the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the further clarification of God conceived as *Sat-chit-anandam*. Reason can only know that Self-existent Being is necessarily intelligent. But only Revelation can tell us how Self-Existent Being's intelligence is satisfied within the term of its being. Revelation teaches us that the differentiating note in Divine knowledge is the response of intelligence. Jesus Christ acknowledges responsively His eternal thought generation from the Father<sup>9</sup>. The relation between the Father and Jesus Christ is the revelation of the true relation between *Sat* and *Chit* as well as the revelation of *anandam*. And this revelation of the inner life of God is for humans to attain the goal of life which is beatific vision, beholding God as He is in Himself.

Regarding the doctrines of Human Person, Sin, Fall, Grace, Atonement and Salvation Upadhyaya maintained the traditional Christian position and hence he tried to explain the traditional understanding of the person of Jesus Christ in terms of the Vedantic understanding of human nature also. The Incarnation was thus accomplished by uniting humanity with Divinity in the person of the Logos and this incarnate God we call Jesus Christ<sup>10</sup>.

Upadhyaya also interpreted the Christian doctrine of creation in terms of the Vedantic concept maya. He pointed out that according to Advaita Vedanta, the world originates by *vivarta*, a kind of communication which does not modify the communicator. *Vivarta* implies creation by will - causation (*sankalpa*). This is also the meaning of *Maya*. *Maya* signifies the will-power (*sankalpa*) of God. It means that creation is by the power (*sakti*) of the will (*sankalpa*) of God<sup>11</sup>. The term *maya* involves three truths: (a) God is not necessarily a creator; (b) creatures are non-beings, transformed as it were into being; (c) the transformation is caused by the mysterious power of the will of God. Upadhyaya then declared that this Vedanta doctrine of *Maya* which explains creation and the Christian doctrine of creation are identical because, according to the Christian doctrine of creation also, God does not create out of necessity but out of the overflow of his

10. Oct. 1898, p. 146; "Hinduism and Christianity as compared by Mrs. Besant", *Sophia*, vol. IV, No. 2, Feb. 1897, p.8; "Question and answers", *Sophia*, Vol. 1, No.11, Aug. 25, 1900, p.7.

9. Summary of the lecture by Upadhyaya; "Hinduism, theosophy and Christianity", *Sophia*, Vol. IV, No. 12, Dec. 1897, pp.2, 4-5; "The Incarnate Logos", *The Twentieth Century*, Vol.1, No. 1, Jan, 1901, pp. 6-7; "Christ's claim to attention", *The Twentieth Century*, Vol. 1, No. 5, May 1901, pp. 115-116.
10. B. Upadhyaya, "The Incarnate Logos", *The Twentieth Century*, Vol. 1, No.1, Jan. 1901, pp. 6-8; "Notes", *Sophia*, Vol. 1, No.4, July 7, 1900, pp. 6-7.
11. cf. B. Upadhyaya, "Maya", *Sophia*, Vol. 1, No. 18, Oct. 17, 1900, pp. 6-7.

perfections; creation has no being in itself; what it has is derived being and creation is the effect of divine thought<sup>12</sup>. Upadhyaya even said that the term *maya* can express the meaning of the doctrine of creation in a far better way than the Latin root *Creare*.

After maintaining God as absolutely different from all appearances as in Advaitic thinking, Carl Keller ventures to point out the direction of an Indian Christology: Jesus Christ is God's appearance in the midst of appearances. Christ is God turned towards the appearance, appearing in appearances. In Christ the absolutely transcendental God serves Itself from Itself to produce the appearance and to become appearance<sup>13</sup>. Keller does not give absolute reality to Incarnation. He claims New Testamental support for maintaining such a view by pointing out that it is not Jesus in the flesh who is the object of our faith and adoration but the *exalted Christ*. Biblical eschatology also points to the fact that at that end it is the transcendent God who becomes all in all and hence significant, not the appearance or the God who is appearing in appearance. Because of the absolute transcendence of Brahman, Vedanta rightly rejects the ultimate reality of the world of appearances. The Bible also does not give ultimate reality to Creation<sup>14</sup>.

It was K. Subba Rao's conviction that total renunciation alone would qualify us to become the disciples of Jesus<sup>15</sup>. We have to give up 'I' and 'Mine'. If complete renunciation in thought, word, deed as well as conquest of the self are not accepted, acceptance of Jesus Christ is nothing but a mockery. Renunciation or Love and Sacrifice which Christ has taught us through his life is the same as giving up duality which is to forsake the body to find the God behind it. The death on the Cross of Jesus Christ was experienced and expounded by Subba Rao as dying to the body and ego as well as the material world<sup>16</sup>.

12. cf. B. Upadhyaya, "The True doctrine of Maya", Vol. VI, No.2, Feb. 1899, pp. 226-28; "Vedantism and Christianity", *Sophia*, Vol.1, Nos. 15 and 16, Sept. 29, 1900, p.6.
13. Carl Keller, "The Vedanta Philosophy and the message of Christ", *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XLII, 1953, p. 388.
14. Ibid., pp. 388-389.
15. Kalagara Subba Rao, *O Lord, Where can I get so many millstones?* Munipalle, n.d. pp. 4, 6, 7, 11; *The Outpouring of My Heart* (translation into English of his Telugu compositions, ed. by C.D. Airan), Guntur: Shrimathy Parripati Sita Mahalakshmi Satyanarayana, 1964, pp. 8, 9, 12, 15, 18, 19, 22, 30; *Three Letters: Become Christ, Don't Pray, Man Created God*, Hyderabad: Hyderabad Reception Committee, 1965, pp. 4, 5, 12, 16.
16. Kalagara Subba Rao, *Retrete Padre*, Second Revised Edition, Machilipatnam, 1972, pp. 34, 37 40, and *The Outpouring of My Heart*, op. cit., pp. 3,7,10, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20,

Subba Rao has not only interpreted the meaning of the life of Jesus from within the Advaita Vedantic conviction, but his explanation of the Christian understanding of sin and salvation is also very much Advaitic in nature. The dualist nonsense of 'you and 'I' is due to Maya and the vision of Jesus makes us forget ourselves and then there is no more 'ajnana' which has misled us to think in terms of 'I' and 'Mine'. The gist of 'jnana' is the teaching that 'I-ness' binds us and jnana alone can remove 'ajnana'. We are in reality Spirit, forgetfulness of this fact makes us the servant of the body and that is Fall and fallen state is sin. For us who are in the sin of delusion, Jesus gave up the delusion and showed the Eternal Form in all forms<sup>17</sup>.

Through denying oneself, anyone can become Christ. We have to go into the mind of Christ; we have to assume His nature; we have to conquer ourselves like Him and it is such effort which is true worship and prayer<sup>18</sup>.

But our Guru Jesus has to help us in order that we arrive at this realization. Jesus is the person who can save us from falling back into 'Maya', from our 'Gunas' which are dragging us in different directions, from the pressure of *Samsara*, from the 'Vasanas'. As we are feeble and faltering and unable to see the way despite endless efforts, only the Divine Guru Jesus can come and show us the Way<sup>19</sup>.

In J.G. Arapura's opinion, in raising the question of the foundations of Christian thought, we must raise the question of Ultimate Reality along with the question of Christ. Wrongly, in Christian thought, history is taken to be the 'place' of Christ. But we must place the event of Jesus as Christ in the Ultimate Reality rather than in history or in the world of humans or in the sphere of action, even if action is construed as that of God. We must raise the question of Ultimate Reality in the Vedantic fashion and at the same time, and within that question itself, ask about the meaning of Jesus Christ<sup>20</sup>. The meaning of Jesus Christ and Brahman are inexhaustible and at some great depth they meet and interpenetrate and that interpenetration is much more than the so

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17. *Three Letters: Become Christ, Don't Pray, Man Created God*, op. cit., pp. 11, 16, 17; *O Lord: Where can I get so many mill-stones?*, op.cit., p. 11; *The Outpouring of My Heart*, op. cit., pp.1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 27, 28, 29.
18. *Three Letters: Become Christ, Don't Pray, Man Created God*, op. cit., pp. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, *Retrete Padre*, op.cit., pp. 16, 17, 25; *O Lord: Where can I get so many mill-stones?* op.cit., pp. 6, 7, *The Outpouring of My Heart*, op. cit., pp. 17, 22, 24; Kalagara Subba Rao, *Translation of the New Songs*, Vijayawada, n.d., pp. 5-6.
19. *The Outpouring of My Heart*, op. cit., pp. 4, 5, 6, 26, 27; *Translation of the New Songs*, op.cit., pp.3, 30, 41-42; *Retrete Padre*, op.cit., pp. 27, 34.
20. J.G. Arapura, "The use of Indian Philosophical traditions in Christian thought", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 2, April-June, 1980, pp. 68-70.

called indigenization or inculturation<sup>21</sup>. The fact of Jesus has to be internalised according to what is ultimately real; when the mortal facticity of the fact is eliminated it is metamorphosed into truth. Ultimate Reality is mystery, *rahasyam* and the metamorphosis of the wonderful fact of Jesus into truth is possible only by leading it to this mystery. We have to hold to heart this mystery of Jesus which is beyond any positive comprehension, while undeteredly dwelling in it and that is what *jnana* is<sup>22</sup>.

Arapura thinks that the universal transhistorical meaning of Jesus Christ becomes actualisable in the actual universality and transhistoricity of the meaning of Brahman and the particular historical meaning of Brahman becomes actualisable in the actual particularity and historicity of the meaning of Jesus Christ<sup>23</sup>. According to him, Christ has to be presented as the redemptive symbol manifesting himself precisely at the point of the non-symbolic ground of Brahman. Christ serves the purpose of a true redemptive symbol by giving us the power to look at ourselves as symbols of God, of Reality, and to address ourselves as thou taking our stand with God as the only I that there is<sup>24</sup>.

According to R.V. De Smet, Sankara's conception of the relation between world and Brahman can explain the relation between the human and the divine natures in Christ<sup>25</sup>. The hypostasis or Person of the Divine Logos takes unto Itself the human nature and the novelty which follows this actuation is entirely on the side of the human nature; so also in divine causation, Brahman remains unchanged. Hence Christ's Incarnation is a case of *vivarta*<sup>26</sup>. *Tadatmya* relation denotes the effect's complete dependence upon the Supreme Atman and hence denotes the relation between creatures and creator; It denotes non-reciprocal relation and hence correctly represents the relation in which the hypostasis or Person of the Divine Logos takes unto Itself the human nature<sup>27</sup>.

21. cf. J.G. Arapura, "A Philosophical Approach to Christology" in *Dialogue in India: Multi-Religious Perspective and Practice*, ed. by K.P. Aleaz, Calcutta: Bishop's College, 1991, pp. 43-55.
22. J.G. Arapura, "The use of Indian Philosophical traditions in Christian Thought", *op.cit.*, pp. 70-71.
23. J.G. Arapura, "A Philosophical Approach to Christology", *op.cit.*, pp. 49-55.
24. J.G. Arapura, "Rediscovering the meaning of the symbol", in *Indian Voices in today's theological debate*; ed. by Horst Burkhardt and Wolfgang M.W. Roth, Lucknow/Delhi/Madras: L.P.H./I.S.P.C.K./C.L.S., 1972, pp. 110-111.
25. R.V. De Smet, "Materials for an Indian Christology", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XII, No. 4, Dec. 1965, pp. 11-13.
26. *Ibid.* 27. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

In S.J. Samartha's opinion we are called to develop a Christology which is unmistakably Christian and recognisably Indian. Such a Christology should take into account two factors namely acceptance of a sense of Mystery and the rejection of an exclusive attitude<sup>28</sup>. The two statements 'Brahman is Sat-cit-ananda' and 'God is Triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit' are two responses to the same Mystery in two cultural-settings and both these formulations can only be symbolic, pointing to the Mystery; one cannot be used as a norm to judge the other<sup>29</sup>. Human responses to the revelation of Mystery are plural; experiences of salvation are plural<sup>30</sup>. Rejecting exclusivism and inclusivism Christians must come to a clearer grasp of the uniqueness of Jesus in terms of a theocentric Christology which is helpful in establishing new relationships with neighbours of other faiths<sup>31</sup>. According to Samartha when the *distinctiveness* of a particular faith is stated in a manner that avoids open or hidden exclusiveness, then only meaningful *relationships* between different communities become possible<sup>32</sup>.

According to the present standpoint of Samartha the unitive vision of Advaita is very relevant for an Indian Christology. Advaita represents a grand vision of unity that encompasses nature, humanity and God<sup>33</sup>. Advaita has an enduring influence on the cultural life of India enabling people to hold together diversities in languages, races, ethnic groups, religions, and more recently different political ideologies as well<sup>34</sup>. Throughout India's history the fact is that it was its cultural unity based on religion that held together elements of race, ethnic group, and languages and diversities of and within different religions<sup>35</sup>. The survival of the political unity of India is based on its cultural unity within which there persists a 'core' of religion to which the sense of 'not twoism', and the mind set that holds together diversities by refusing to be exclusive, make an enduring contribution<sup>36</sup>. The misconception that ethical and social concerns are not taken seriously in Advaita is a Western Christian negative criticism which Indian Christians should abandon once for all; so that they will not be committing any more theological suicide<sup>37</sup>.

In Samartha's view a Christology from below or a *bullock-cart* Christology and not a *helicopter* Christology or a Christology from above is the need of the hour in Asia<sup>38</sup>. In the religio-cultural pluralism

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28. S.J. Samartha, *One Christ-Many Religions, Toward a Revised Christology*, Bangalore: SATHRI, 1992, pp. 94-104.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-96. 30. *Ibid.*, p. 96. 31. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 102. 33. *Ibid.*, pp.122-27. 34. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

35. *Ibid.* 36. *Ibid.*, p. 126. 37. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-37.

of India, what has to be expounded is, the exclusive claim that only in Jesus Christ God has revealed *once-for-all* to redeem all humanity is not integral to the gospel<sup>39</sup>. The neighbours of other faiths have also *their* stories to tell about their 'lords' and 'saviours' like Buddha, Rama and Krishna<sup>40</sup>. Samartha through his long experience has come to the conviction that the theory of multiple *avatara*s seems to be theologically the most accommodating attitude in a pluralistic setting that permits recognising both the Mystery of God and the freedom of people to respond to divine initiatives in different ways at different times<sup>41</sup>. He pleads for a theocentric Christology.

## 2. The Christian Theologians who Reinterpret Advaita Vedanta

Under the reinterpretation model the first Christian thinker we noted was P. Johanns. He wanted to reconcile the different schools of Vedanta in Thomism in order to arrive at Christ<sup>42</sup>. Sankara's understanding of God is giving a foundation for this, while the superstructure has to be built by other Vedantins. According to him the central doctrine conveyed by Sankara is the doctrine of the absolute independence of God and such a conception of God constitutes the foundation of true Theism. Sankara conceived God as one of 'absolute personality' or 'supreme personality'. Sankara calls God the Highest Self that is its own reality and he identifies consciousness with selfness and in the opinion of Johanns, self consciousness constitutes the character of personality. In Sankara's system, as per Johanns' view, God is not a person on account of His/Her relation to human persons, but God is a person in relation to Himself/Herself<sup>43</sup>. In fact these views have been suggested by Brahmapandit Upadhyaya before Johanns. But the method of reinterpretation which is absent in Upadhyaya we notice in Johanns.

*Creatio ex nihilo* is the doctrine which Johanns suggests for the further development of Sankara<sup>44</sup>. This concept, he claims, can

39. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-50.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

42. P. Johanns, "To Christ through the Vedanta", *The Light of the East*, Vol. 1, No. 1, October 1922, p. 3.

43. P. Johanns, "To Christ through the Vedanta", *The Light of the East*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Nov. 1922, p. 3; Vol. IV, No. 5, February 1926, p. 5; "Short Outline of Hinduism", *The Light of the East*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, Dec. 1934, p. 31; No. 4, Jan 1935, p. 43; *A Synopsis to Christ Through the Vedanta Part I. Sankara*, Calcutta: Secretariat of the 'Light of the East', 1930. Light of the East Series, No. 4.

44. P. Johanns, "To Christ through the Vedanta", *The Light of the East*, Vol. V, No. 7, April 1927, pp. 5-6; "Christian Faith and Vedanta", *The Light of the East*,

simultaneously maintain the reality of the world as well as the absoluteness and unrelatedness of God. According to *Creatio ex nihilo* the world can only claim privation as its own. Privation exists because God as absolute perfection claims all perfections. Privation comes from God not because God contains it but because God excludes it. As all things completely come from God, God's power must reach down to the negation of all things as its own possible term. The claim of Johanns was that in the light of *creatio ex nihilo* we can arrive at the conception of a self-giving God which is lacking in Sankara and also we can overcome the disharmony which exists between matter and spirit in Vedanta.

In Mark Sunder Rao's view, the Christian doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation throw light on Christian non-dualism, *ananyatva*<sup>45</sup>. Each of the three Father, Son and Holy Spirit possesses a perfect *hypostasis* and yet maintains one common *ousia*; the coinherence in one another being effected by *perichoresis*. The relation between the human and the divine natures in the Incarnation is also interpreted with the concept *perichoresis*. The perichoresis in the Incarnation is effected in a sequence, first the divine nature penetrates the human and then the human nature penetrates into the divine. The human nature assumed in the Incarnation is not the common fallen humanity, but the one already penetrated by the divine. Moreover the union of the divine and the human in the Incarnation is a hypostatic union, at the ontological level. But because of our fallen humanity, we cannot have this hypostatic union, or ontological union as Advaita Vedanta thinks; what is possible for us is *unio mystica*, union at the level of the Spirit<sup>46</sup>. But *perichoresis* is there in both forms of union.

Swami Abhishiktananda has interpreted Jesus Christ as *Cit* in the context of his interpretation of Trinity as Saccidananda. While Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya holds the view that with regard to the concept of Supreme Being the advaitic and Christian doctrines are identical, Abhishiktananda would point out that a reinterpretation of the Hindu concept Saccidananda is necessary to make it Christian.

When the advaitic Saccidananda is considered in the light of Christian experience of the Trinity, it gives the impression of being essentially monistic and of terminating in unbroken silence<sup>47</sup>. Advaita

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Vol. XIV, No. 8, May 1936, pp. 93-94; "Sankara-Ramanuja-Madhava", *The Light of the East*, Vol. XIII, No. 10, July 1935, pp. 116-117. *A Synopsis to Christ through the Vedanta Part I. Samkara*, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

45. Mark Sunder Rao, *Ananyatva. Realisation of Christian non-duality*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1964, pp. 23, 24.

46. *Ibid.* p. 25.

47. Swami Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda. A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1974, pp. 43, 174.

conceives Being as monad. Because of the advaitic understanding of Being as monad, advaita faces the antinomy and paradox of created being. Only in the light of the Trinitarian revelation of Being as communion we are able to resolve the mystery of Creation. Revelation of God in Jesus Christ as Trinity is the solution to the paradox of created being. Jesus Christ provides us the revelation that 'Being is communion'<sup>48</sup>. Hence Creation can be understood as the 'expansion' of God's inner self-manifestation. In the very mystery of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, human person discovers himself/herself as a unique and irreplaceable manifestation of God's Being and love<sup>49</sup>.

Abhishiktananda explains the Hindu Advaitic experience of Saccidananda as follows<sup>50</sup>: A person realizes Being, *Sat*, as himself/herself as well as infinitely beyond himself/herself. A person *is*, and knows that he/she *is*. This is the mystery of pure awareness, *Cit*, of Self. When pure self-awareness is sufficiently realized the whole being is flooded with an inexpressible sense of completion, peace, joy and fulness and this is what the Hindu tradition calls *Ananda*. Thus if one descends into the successive depths of one's true self, namely, being, awareness of being and joy in being, then finally nothing will be left but he/she himself/herself, the only one, infinitely alone, Being, Awareness and Bliss, Saccidananda.

The claim of Abhishiktananda was that in Jesus Christ we get a different picture<sup>51</sup>. In the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father there is the expression of oneness as well as the expression of the distinct face-to-face relation.

It should be noted that towards the end of his life Abhishiktananda could experience the saving Christ only as pure Self-awareness—I AM, going beyond religious distinctions. But at the same time he finalised the English text of his book *Saccidananda* in this period which propagates the approach of Inclusivism or the Theory of fulfilment, suggesting this an amount of self-contradiction in his standpoint<sup>52</sup>.

In Bede Griffiths we notice a continuation of the thought of Abhishiktananda. According to him Sankara teaches the reality of

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 103, 109, 117, 135.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104, 124, 130; Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian meeting Point. Within the cave of the heart*, Bombay/Bangalore: The Institute of Indian Culture/CISRS, 1969, p. 84; *Prayer*; Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1967, p.3.

50. *Saccidananda*, pp. 167-170.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80, 82, 88, 91, 95, 97, 98, 176-179, 184-185, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, pp. XVI, 80, 96-97.

52. cf. James Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda. His Life told through his letters*, pp. 293, 294, 305, 306, 317, 318, 321, 329, 342, 346, 348, 350, 353. ~

the world as Brahman. Reality for him is the eternal procession of self-manifestation, of self-knowledge and the eternal over-flow of bliss. Jesus is the manifestation of this Saccidananda and this is what is happening in each one of us, if we could only know ourselves. Like Jesus, we are for ever coming forth from the Father into the light of self-knowledge and returning to the Father in the bliss of love<sup>53</sup>. Each of us comes forth eternally from the hidden depths of the Father into being in the Word, the Son, the *Cit* and when we come into being in time we become distinct and separate. The Fall is our fall into this present mode of consciousness, where everything is divided, centred on itself- and set in conflict with others. Sin is alienation from our real self, it is to fall into a separate, divided self. Redemption – atonement - is the return to unity, it is awakening to our true being in the Word<sup>54</sup>. In Jesus the sin which brought a divided consciousness into the world is overcome and Nature and humans are restored to their original unity with God<sup>55</sup>. Though there is no duality, there is relationship in the Godhead between Father, Son and Spirit. Each created being participates in this very relationship. In the knowledge of the One Self, the individual self does not simply disappear; he/she is a unique centre of consciousness in the universal consciousness<sup>56</sup>.

According to Raimundo Panikkar, the role of Isvara in Vedanta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought. It is precisely this correspondence that provides Indian philosophy with a locus for Christ and Christian theology for Isvara<sup>57</sup>. If we start with the historicity of Christ, essential though it may be, we are liable to be gravely misunderstood. The Christ of Hinduism is one who is 'hidden and unknown' as the Isvara of the Vedanta. Isvara is the unknown Christ of Hinduism<sup>58</sup>. In Vedanta, the concept Isvara is one which is put forward to explain the problem of the relation between Brahman and World. But the concept Isvara cannot solve the problem satisfactorily. Sankara's Isvara cannot be a true mediator as he is

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53. Bede Griffiths, *Return to the Centre*, London: Fount Paperback, 1978, pp. 58-59. cf. also Bede Griffiths, *Vedanta and Christian Faith*, Los Angeles: The Dawn House Press, 1973, pp. 14-29.

54. *Return to the Centre*, *op.cit.*, pp. 28, 29, 30, 46, 47, 127.

55. Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West. A Sequel to the Golden String*, London: Fount Paperback, 1983, pp. 34-35.

56. *Return to the Centre*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43; *The Marriage of East and West. A Sequel to the Golden String*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

57. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism towards an ecumenical Christophany*. Revised and Enlarged Edition, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981, p. 16.

58. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, First Edition, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968, p. 137.

only real from one end and not real from the other. In Sankara's advaita, the diversity between Brahman and Isvara is overstressed in order to save the absolute purity of the former<sup>59</sup>. In Ramanuja's Visistadvaita, it is the identity between Brahman and Isvara which is overstressed to save the reality of the world and hence again Isvara is not a satisfactory 'link'<sup>60</sup>. According to Panikkar only Christ can be the true link between the World and God. The Isvara of Panikkar's interpretation, he claims, is really 'human' without ceasing to be divine and it points towards a reality which not only connects the two poles of God and world, but which 'is' the two poles without permitting them to coalesce and in the Christian language this Isvara of his interpretation points towards the Mystery of Christ<sup>61</sup>. In other words, Panikkar is reinterpreting the concept Isvara of Vedanta so that it becomes the already formulated traditional Christian understanding of Christ.

Of course it is also true that by the name 'Christ' Panikkar now means more than Jesus of Nazareth, even though Jesus is the manifestation of Christ for the Christian. Christ is the supername. Christic principle for him is the center of reality as seen by the Christian tradition in a theanthropo-cosmic vision<sup>62</sup>.

In Panikkar's view because of the stress on the immanence of the Ultimate Reality and a non-relational union with the Reality, Advaitic spirituality is somewhat identical with the spirituality of the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian spirituality has to perfect the Advaitic spirituality<sup>63</sup>.

Sara Grant like De Smet shows that *tadatmya* relation means the relation between Creation and Brahman is a non-reciprocal dependence relation. Human experience of 'aham brahmasmi' - 'I am Brahman' is the experience that we are totally from Brahman, apart from which we are non-being; and hence it is not necessarily an experience of Brahman's innermost nature as It is in Itself<sup>64</sup>. Hence according to Sara Grant, Christ's experience of *aham brahmasmi* can be pictured as different from ordinary human person's experience. When Christ

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 125, 128, 129.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

61. *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

62. Raimundo Panikkar, 'The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges. Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-consciousness' in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 92, 113-114.

63. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and World Religions. Icon-Person-Mystery*. Madras / Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1970, pp. 32-67.

64. Sara Grant, "Reflections on the mystery of Christ suggested by a study of Sankara's concept of relation", in *God's Word among men*, ed. by George Gispert-Sauch, S.J., Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 1973, p. 110.

says, 'aham brahma smi' the Mystery, Self is expressed or uttered in the inmost reality of its own Being<sup>65</sup>. The advaitin has the concept of sin as *avidya*, i.e., the ascription of a false autonomy to created being. Christ has brought us redemption in the sense that he became the very antithesis of self-assertion taking upon himself all the consequences of human assertion of a false autonomy, even unto death on the cross and drawing the whole creation back to the full recognition of its dependence on its source, the Father<sup>66</sup>.

According to Vandana Jesus could be conceived as Chit. She, like Abhishiktananda, is for a theology of experience. We should have the Upanisadic experience and in that experience bring forth the Trinitarian experience as the culmination of Advaitic experience. What she suggests is a Christological interpretation of the Upanisads<sup>67</sup>.

### 3. The Christian Theologians Who Reject Advaita Vedanta

In the Rejection Model we noted the view of P.D. Devanandan that the classical Hindu Vedantic theology is incapable of giving an ideological basis for the new anthropology emerging in independent India<sup>68</sup> and where it is failing to find a solution, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ has got an answer to give. The different aspects of the answer are: When God became human person, that effects a revolutionary significance for the world. A person gets an understanding of life as one in which God Himself is purposely involved. Christ gives meaningful ideological basis for service (*diakonia*) as one in which God's redemptive power is at work in our day-to-day life liberating the individual and renewing human society. If human being is God's creature and God is human beings creator, God is the God who involves in world-life and history. Christian thought stands for the idea of personality as applied both to finite and infinite being. Individuals can enter into creative relationship in community due to their being bound together as persons in relation to the person<sup>69</sup>. Lack of emphasis of the sinful

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

66. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114; cf. also Sara Grant, *Towards an alternative theology. Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian*, Bangalore: Asia Publishing House, 1991.

67. Vandana, *Waters of Fire*, Madras: CLS, 1981; "Reflection of a Christian on the Upanishads", in *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, ed. by D.S. Amalorpavadas, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1974, pp. 237-259.

68. P.D. Devanandan, *The Concept of Maya: An essay in historical survey of the Hindu theory of the world, with special reference to the Vedanta*, London: Lutherworth Press, 1950, p. 227.

69. P.D. Devanandan, *The Gospel and the Hindu intellectual. A Christian Approach*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1958, pp. 23-27; *The Gospel and Renascent Hinduism*,

nature of human person and the purposive will of a personal God as well as over-emphasis on the gulf between the transcendental Being and Karmasamsara-life are the characteristic limitations of Hinduism<sup>70</sup>, which can be overcome by the following facts related to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ: Human person is fallen and sinful, God is actively involved in world history and God's redemptive plan is cosmic in its scope<sup>71</sup>.

In Surjit Singh's view, the values at stake in Advaita Vedanta are of personality, of history and of time. It is confusing to call God personal in Advaita system. Also according to Advaita, ultimately individuality of a person is lost in the Absolute<sup>72</sup>. Hence Surjit Singh wishes to safeguard the reality of personality, human and divine, of history, of time and of the world by recapturing the New Testament significance of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It means that individuality in so far as it aligns itself with the pattern of Ultimate Reality, will be affirmed and preserved<sup>73</sup>.

The Divine-Human relation in Jesus Christ has the characteristics of involvement, interaction, interpenetration and a new paradigm<sup>74</sup>. Divine-Human relation in Jesus shows the capacity of relatability in the inner structure of God; God is Saguna, personal. It shows the working of God in both an individual human person and also in socio-historical groups. Moreover, Jesus shows that God and a concrete human person move towards each other through the valley of the cross to the mountain top of the resurrection. Christ is the foundation which enables human movement from estrangement with God, self, and the world to reconciliation with God, self and the world<sup>75</sup>.

London: SCM Press, 1959, IMC Research Pamphlets No. 8, PP. 57-59; *Preparation for Dialogue: A Collection of essays on Hinduism and Christianity in New India*, ed. by Nalini Devanandan and M.M. Thomas, Bangalore: CISRS, 1964. Devanandan Memorial Volume No. 2, pp. 39-40, 164-168.

70. *Preparation for Dialogue*, op. cit., p. 38.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 170; P.D. Devanandan, *Christian concern in Hinduism*, Bangalore: CISRS, 1961, p. XI.
72. Surjit Singh, *Christology and Personality*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d., pp. 19, 139, 140, 141, 143-151, 151-158.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 158, 159, 162-163.
74. Surjit Singh, *A Philosophy of Integral Relation (Samyagdarsana)*, Madras/Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1981. Indian Christian Thought Series, No. 15, pp. 32-34.
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35, 39.

#### 4. Conclusion

Thus it is significant to note that there are many theologians in India who receive Advaita Vedantic thought totally in their endeavour to construct Christian thought.

Indian Christians are fortunate to be acquainted with Advaita Vedantic experience in order that it may enrich their faith-experience. Deeper dimensions of Christian thought on God, humans and creation are manifesting through the aid of Sankara's thought. Deeper meanings of the person and function of Jesus are emerging from within Advaita Vedanta. Indian Christian theologians are slowly recognising this. Of course all of them have not yet recognised this. Still there are Indian Christian theologians who are exclusivists and reject Advaita Vedanta. Still there are Indian Christian theologians who are inclusivists, who try to reinterpret Advaita to suit their preformulated Christian standpoint and find the fulfilment of Advaita in Christ. But the good news is that there are many Christian theologians who follow the approaches of either pluralism or pluralistic inclusivism and who are able to experience the fulfilment of a preformulated Christian theology in Advaitic experience. Advaita Vedanta makes Christian faith experience new and refreshing. The last one hundred years of the second millennium bear witness to this glorious truth.

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# **Wake up and Smell the Future: Cultural Perspectives on the 20th Century**

**George Pattery**

The author maintains that the twentieth century at the end of the 2nd millennium gives a wake-up call to pay attention to the differing world-views of various cultures and religions. The Weberian thesis that economic and political realities shape and influence religious tenets practice and vice versa is verified in the history of the Indian Church. Hence there are great many conflicting self images that have to be critically examined and selfness and otherness integrated in a new paradigm.

“Wake up and smell the future; wake up on the right side of history; wake up and breathe in the cold, arctic air of a moribund modernity; wake up and breathe out the fire of a post-modern future – with all its omens, amens, and amends” (Leonard Sweet- 1999, in the Introduction). This is how the millennial thinking is being introduced. The beginning and the end of a century brings millenarian perspectives with a certain amount of apocalyptic vision. We are told that Israel is preparing for millennial dangers from the Muslims and the Christians. The emergence of different religious sects evidences the repeat of the phenomena as at the end of last century, although one cannot simply conclude that there is nothing new in the movements. At the end of the last century, the western world was primarily colonial in nature and the Christian world was then largely confined to what is today known as Eastern and Western Europe, and naturally the dominant paradigm of thought remained western, Christian, and colonial. Millennial apocalyptic thinking was then fashionable.

At the end of this century the world has woken up to different world-views of various cultures and religions. Today in fact for a majority of people, it is neither an end nor a beginning to a century as the concept of time itself differs from one culture to another. There is bounded and unbounded time; there is linear and cyclic time. The western and Greek concepts of time are associated with a linear pattern, while the cyclic concept is ascribed to Eastern thought. These are not water-tight compartments.

In a Christian world-view, dominated by the concept of a God who intervenes in history, events are of significance; whereas in a thought

pattern where God is all pervasive and the sustaining energy and power of this world, 'place' is of importance. Today there are many world-views. There is no one world-view that is over-arching humankind. There never was one, although we were made to believe so by the dominant socio-political western model. From this changed perspective, an overview of this century is attempted here in order to highlight the cultural patterns that have emerged over the century, from an Indian perspective. The approach here will be more synthetic and reflective in nature rather than analytic and critical. It is rather difficult to diagnose a century. Unlike the positivistic sciences, here we cannot draw up criteria for a diagnosis. We are dealing with particular phenomena against the background of over-arching tendencies, i.e., specification of individual details coinciding with the general picture. We need a kind of subsuming power of judgement along with a reflective power of judgement (Maureen Junker-Kenny, 1999, 94). Rather we can only arrive at a certain 'orienting generalisation'.

Post-modernism has brought to relief the concept of the 'other' as a significant epistemological and hermeneutical tool (Maureen Junker-Kenny, 1999, 96-97; Gianni Vattimo, 1997). Our attempt will be to use the category of the 'other' in a more flexible manner to interpret the century and to thread it together in a rational way. There is ambivalence in the encounter with the other. The other is strange, yet has his/her own rights. The other can talk and relate, in his/her own right. Yet the other has a language and world of his/her own that look strange, even when he/she uses 'my own language'. The other-ness in the other, and alterity that is obviously there bring to focus the 'selfness'. Hence selfness and otherness in their ambivalence could give us a lead in understanding history (Maureen Junker-Kenny, 1999, 99). The cultural history of the twentieth century may be qualified as the ambivalent yet dynamic story of the relationship between 'selfness and otherness' of peoples and cultures. This seems to be all the more true of twentieth century India.

## 1. The Colonial Other

At the dawn of this century India was the 'glorious' colony of Britain. The process of colonization began with the victory of the East India Company in the battle of Plassey; it got consolidated through the political decision of the Crown of Britain to take over the Indian Administration after the first serious revolt of the Indian Army for independence. Though the colonization unfolded gradually and systematically, by the beginning of this century, there was a definite perception in India of the colonial Other. This perception was real and acute in economic terms as far as the masses were concerned. The colonization of the Indian economy under British rule is of tremendous

importance for any student of modern Indian history – the first classic capitalist power, creating and transforming the largest colony in the world. This was achieved mainly through the rationalization of the power to levy and collect land revenue and other taxes, and through the British imperialist industrial policy of seizure of Indian markets. (Habib, 1995, 299 & 326)

The perception of Britain as the 'colonial other' triggered off the struggle for liberation on the one hand, and the search for India's self on the other. And in fact, this struggle for liberation was against the colonial other, later on to be replaced by the Indian version of the same colonial other.

The irreconcilable contradictions that emerged between imperialism and its junior ally, the landlords on the one hand, and the bulk of the Indian people, including the bourgeoisie, the working class and the peasantry, on the other hand, laid the seeds of the struggle for national liberation. The whole epoch that followed, spanning their first-half of this century and ending with the withdrawal of British imperialism and the parting of the ways of the Indian bourgeoisie and the proletariat, constituted (the fourth and) the final stage of colonialism in India. (Habib, 1995, 335).

The political history of the British rule in India is only one of the reasons for this perception. In India, unlike in other colonies of the European powers, by the dawn of the century, the 'cultural nationhood' had taken a definite shape. The Bengal renaissance (though one cannot really talk of it as a renaissance affecting the life and the thought of the people as a whole as it was confined to the Bhadralok class), the birth of the Indian National Congress (again more of an elite group), and more definitely with the arrival of Gandhi (with his seminal publication of *Hind Swara*) together articulated a 'cultural self' of India. This cultural-self saw itself in contrast to and in opposition to the 'colonial self'<sup>1</sup>. The emergent cultural pattern at the dawn of the century from an Indian point of view is this perception of the colonial self as the *Other* – the stranger in contrast to a glorious 'selfness'. This remains a permanent mark of Indian perception, even for those born after Independence, though in a markedly different way.

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1. "There is no doubt at all about the accomplishments of the astronomer Aryabhatta, who proved that the earth is round and revolves around the sun, a thousand years before Galileo was censured for arguing for the same; about Bhaskaracharya's understanding of gravitation a millennium before Issac Newton; about the invention, credited largely to Gritasamada, of the zero and the entire system of decimal numbers... The Arabs themselves

## 2. The Colonised Other and the Mimetic Self

The colonised self perceived itself as a proud cultural self, but not as a mono-cultural self. Even though India was ruled for two centuries by one 'colonial power', India did not lose its 'multiple identity self'. India remained 'Bharat' with its multiple identities of Dravida, Maratha, Sindhu, Bangla cultures. India was never colonized in its cultural self and in its multiple identities. This was the strength of India. Then how did it lend itself to be colonized? In that seminal book called 'Hind Swaraj' Gandhi analyzed the root cause of India's fate as 'mimesis'. India for a while forgot its true self and strength, and began to imitate Britain in its material splendour and industrial might. In fact, the same logic can be applied to Britain. It forgot its true self and assumed a false 'colonial' self. Therefore the Gandhian way for India's liberation was qualitatively different and in a sense belonged to the Buddhist tradition.

Let us digress for a while to look at the Girardian thesis on 'mimesis' in order to better understand the tangle in which India was in. Girard holds that human beings are subject to intense desire, though they may not know for what. The reason is that there is a desire for *being*; something the person lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The other, apparently endowed with a superior being, desires some object, and that object must be capable of conferring a greater plenitude of being. The example of the model arouses similar desire in the subject. Desire thus enters upon a triangular pattern. Something is desired because it is presented as 'desirable'. (Rene Girard, 1979, 116). Because another desires something I desire it. According to Girard this mimetic pattern leads to rivalry and jealousy and ends up in violence. The object is conquered through a kind of 'sacrificial crisis' and brings about a sort of peace. (R. Girard, 1978, 52). However with the beginning of this century, India woke up from a mimetic self to a resurgent self, especially in cultural terms. The components of this

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referred to mathematics as *Hindasat*, "the Indian science". Nor do scholars contest India's claim to have produced the first surgeon, Susruta, whose methods (and tools) of surgery, including plastic surgery and prostheses for amputees, pioneered the field, to have given the world quadratic equations and trigonometry; to have set out the principles of grammar and phonetics; to have raised questions of philosophy and psychology in the Upanishads a thousand years before they had occurred to anyone in the West; and to have developed an imaginative literature, from the animal fables of the panchatantra to the sophisticated dramas of Kalidasa, that inspired – according to the Chinese scholar Lin Yutang-Aesop, Boccacio, Emerson, Goethe, Herder, Hesse, Schopenhauer, and the *Arabian Nights*." Shashi Tharoor, *India: From midnight to Millennium*, p. 300.

resurgence, as mentioned earlier, were the Bengal renaissance, the freedom struggle and the phenomenon of Gandhi.

The Church in India however chose to remain with the 'mimetic self' looking up to the west as the guardian and the protector of Christianity. But for a few individuals, the church in India was incapable of understanding the larger dynamics at work in the country and the global implications of the colonial rule. The western Other was the significant other for the church. If this was true of the Indian church, the wider church was not far from this logic either. Colonialism was never condemned; nor did the church ask for compensation for the colonial victims. Its arguments for writing off the debts of the third world countries lack any force as it is not ready to openly argue for compensation for colonial victimisation, at least in material terms. So, when India struggled out of her 'mimetic serfdom', the church in India chose to continue to be a mimetic self. The cultural self of India won political freedom in the most traumatic way that is imaginable – with the massacre of thousands in the name of religion. Was the Girardian thesis being proved? - that there need to be 'founding sacrifice' in order to bring about an apparent peace. While the cycle of violence subsided into a convenient peace, on hindsight we recognize that this baptism of fire would keep simmering for the rest of this century, even today up to Kargil days.

### **3. Manufactured Self and the Marginalized 'Others'**

The post-Independent self of India met with two different paradigms in its effort to articulate itself: the Nehruvian and the Gandhian. In the ensuing debate, the Nehruvian paradigm won and coloured India's self for the next fifty years. The Nehruvian model was based on the idea of a nation-state which was in fact an 'imagined or at best a manufactured self'. The political nationalism of post-independent India 'imagined itself as a community' apart and away from the cultural nation that India was. The post-independent India operated upon a manufactured self of nation-state in the process of which it produced many 'marginalised selves'. This was achieved through a process of appropriating and conquering multiple-identities.

Arundathi Roy's study of the 'Big Dams' in India illustrates how over the last fifty years, in the process of manufacturing a nation-state self, India has produced marginalised selves of tribals and dalits – the dispensable lot of India (Arundathi Roy, 1999, 56). She argues that the Government of India has detailed figures for how many million tonnes of grain or edible oil this country produces, how many cricket matches we lost on Fridays at Sharjah, how many graduates we produced, how many men had vasectomies in any given year, but it does not have a figure for the number of people that have been

displaced by dams, or sacrificed in other ways at the altars of 'National Progress'. She then rightly asks: 'Isn't this *astounding*? How can you measure progress, if you don't know what it costs and who paid for it? How can the 'market' put a price on things – food, clothes, electricity, running water – when it doesn't take into account the *real* cost of production?' (Arundathi Roy, 1999, 57).

According to her, in a study of 54 Large Dams done by the Indian Institute of Public Administration, the average number of people displaced by a Large Dam is 44,182. Admittedly, 54 dams out of 3,300 is not a big enough sample... a rough calculation works out to 33 million people – displaced by big dams alone in the last 50 years. What about those displaced by the thousands of other Development Projects? At a private lecture, N.C. Saxena, Secretary to the Planning Commission, said that he thought the number was in the region of 50 million (of which 40 million were displaced by dams) (Arundathi Roy, 1999, p. 57). Such a massive displacement could be done because of the 'ethnic otherness' of the tribal people and the cultural alienation of the dalits. Post-independent India, in spite of its resurgent cultural self, is ambivalent in its present status as a nation. It has run in pursuit of creating a national-self, at the cost of its multi-faced cultural self, and ended up in miming the West. It has big dams, atom bombs, but has forgotten its best self. The Hindutva version of this self has only helped people to forget their true historical past and be mindful of a 'manufactured India' that depends on the 'otherness' of the other. A nation-state like India is an 'imagined concept' while Bharat is a multi-cultured real self. In building the former, many cultures have been marginalised. The 'selfness' of the nation-state has created the 'other' of the many indigenous cultures.

#### 4. The Global Self and Otherness

Can we extend this paradigm of 'selfness and otherness' to the global level? What was the global landscape at the beginning of this century? As already remarked, the twentieth century began with the colonial self and the colonised otherness. Though dominant, this paradigm soon took upon different shades and underwent changes. The major asset of imperialism had disappeared, namely the readiness of colonial populations, once conquered, to let themselves be quietly administered by a handful of occupiers (Eric Hobsbawm, 1994, 562). The colonised people recognised their self-alienation and the strangeness of the colonial other. Gradually the poles of the paradigm shifted. While the colonial self was busy constructing the colonised other, the fascist-self began to construct a totally 'other' of the colonial powers, and brought about two major world wars, unprecedented in human history both for their military power and for the loss of lives. The colonial self became its own victim.

The post-war world would soon place itself into two major blocks of 'socialist self and capitalist other' and vice versa. The socialist ideal assumed and economy based on the social ownership of all means of production, distribution, and exchange and the elimination of private enterprise and resource allocation by a competitive market. The capitalist-other holds a theological faith in an economy in which resources were allocated entirely by the totally unrestricted market under conditions of unlimited competition - a state of affairs believed to produce not only the maximum of goods and services, but also the maximum of happiness and the only kind of society deserving the name of 'freedom' (Eric Hobsbawm pp. 563-4). Both proposed to solve the problems of social living. The militarisation of this ideological otherness led to the Cold War and reached the brink of nuclear disaster. The collapse of the communist block has apparently deconstructed this paradigm; or rather it has been replaced with a mono-self of 'capitalism' with a philosophy of maximised production of unlimited goods for unrestricted consumption and satisfaction of individual needs. The second half of this century brought about an economic growth that seems to bring the western world into unlimited prosperity. However sooner the mono-capital-self had to face itself: "A rate of economic growth like that of the second half of the Short Twentieth Century, if maintained indefinitely (assuming this to be possible), must have irreversible and catastrophic consequences for the natural environment of this planet, including the human race which is part of it. It will not destroy the planet or make it absolutely uninhabitable, but will certainly change the pattern of life on the biosphere, and may well make it uninhabitable by the human species as we know it in anything like its present numbers" (Eric Hobsbawm, P. 569). The ecological crisis and awareness has brought about two things to the fore: a) From the environmental point of view, if humanity was to have a future, the capitalism of the Crisis Decades is not the answer; b) an unrealistic dream of zero growth approach and the suggestion to live like the primitive man is not possible either. Yet what is true is that the rate of development must be reduced to a sustainable medium run and a balance would have to be struck between humanity and the renewable sources of energy and impact on the environment. Has the ecological crisis brought a deconstruction of the post-modernist paradigm of the other? The answer is ambivalent. Another mode of 'self and other' is being constructed: the globalisation and the international redistribution of production would continue to bring most of the rest of the world's population into the global economy, but at the expense of widening the chasm between the rich and poor countries of the world. The belief that unrestricted international trade would allow the poorer countries to come closer to the rich, runs counter to historical

experience as well as common sense. A world economy developing by the generation of such growing inequalities is accumulating future troubles. Alarming signals are a) technology continues to squeeze human labour out of the production of goods and services, without providing work for people; b) globalization shifted industry from the rich countries to cheap hands and heads; c) this led to cheap labour economies giving rise to many social problems and protectionist measures; d) a pure market economy growing into an uncontrolled machine. The cost of public social security and welfare is too costly and needs to be restricted. The rational choice of profit-making business means to cut down the number of employees and to reduce social security, and this leads to enormous social inequalities that needs more than economics to deal with.

Further more, the growth of the international order and globalization has led to the weakening of the nation-state at the hands of these international institutions. Similarly the quick decision-makers were the private corporations, supranational authorities and non-democratic regimes. There is a general apathy for the democratic process. For most people collective identification with their country came more easily through national sports, teams and non-political symbols. *Fin-de-siècle* seems to bring about a culture of multiple identities and multiple selves, not in a primitive simplicity, but through scientific information technology and cultural shifts.

### **5. Ecclesial self and Otherness of peoples**

The Weberian thesis that economic and political realities shape and influence religious tenets and practices, and that religious belief systems affect the formation of economic theories and ideologies seem to have been verified in the history of the Church of the twentieth century. This century began with a colonial church well-entrenched in the dominant ideologies of the powers that were. Colonialism gave way to nationalist and cultural sentiments, always finding justification through the missionary mandate of the gospels or through the interpretative understanding of incarnational theology. In the ensuing polemics between the socialist and the capitalist cold war, the Church put a cold foot forward, at times coming out with socialist looking social teaching, but often siding with capitalist ideologies. The peoples were 'the other' of the mission territories to be 'converted to' the church-self. The celebrated statement of Karl Rahner that with Vat II the Church has become a 'world-church' remains more of an aspiration than reality. Rather, the Church seems to adapt the policy planning of the multi-nationals or of the global technocrat, reaching out everywhere, but always belonging to the first world. The justification this time is more historical than theological, and more philosophical than biblical.

A typical example is the latest document of *Fides and Ratio*. Do we witness, at the end of this century, a deconstruction of this existing paradigm and the emergence of a pluralistic and multiple identity pattern? As we noted earlier, the eco-sensibility has occasioned such an approach at the secular level. How about the multiple-centricity within the church? The attempts of something the eco-feminine-pluralistic thinking in the church (recall the cases of Mathew Fox and strictures on women's issues, and the verdicts on theologians with a 'difference' seem to counter any optimism. If we were to rely on the Weberian thesis to unfold, there is hope for the future. Secular realities shape religious discourse. Theologically one could argue that the on-going revelation in and through the socio-cultural economic and ecological realities of the world cannot but usher in a new Spirit of the multiplicity and the variety of the original blessing for the Earth-Ecclesia.

## 6. Integration of 'selfness and otherness': a new cultural paradigm

Where have we reached at the end of this century? Are we moving towards disintegration or can we envisage a new culture of integration? This century began with boundless confidence in the capacity of the human mind to know everything by means of the so-called scientific method, to land on the moon and to assert national cultures; yet the brute facts of history of violations of cultures, and mass destruction through the two world wars marred our vision. This century witnessed the enormous surge of the Spirit in the form of 'independence struggles' of many colonised nations; the supreme examples of magnanimity of the human spirit in resisting evil with goodness as in the Gandhian phenomenon, in the struggle of Nelson Mandela and in the defiance of Ms. Suu Kyi; but this century could not escape the inhumanity of massacres and fatwas in the name of caste, religion and nation, the killing fields of the two world wars, Hiroshima and the ugly faces of fascism. The rhetoric of today's consumerist culture sounds more narcissistic, pragmatist and restless, with a disproportionate emphasis on individual rights and liberties; considering everything in terms of achievement, doing and accomplishment, and hungry for experience, that keeps on going, exploring options, gobbling up sound and visual bite supplies of instant wisdom that 'work for me'. If it does not work for me, I move on (Michael Downey, 1999, 126-128)<sup>2</sup>. Can we realistically say that the world is heading towards a new cultural paradigm?

2. "Our age is characterised by impermanence and provisionality. We find it difficult to stay with anything and be really alive and passionate about anything, day after day, week by week, year by year. Diversion is what is constant.

Let us digress for a while to examine Ken Wilber's thesis on an integral vision. He has argued for the dialectical progress of human consciousness towards a new culture of integration – a progress that is dialectical in nature and thus often deceptively regressive looking. Evolution inherently means that new potentials, new wonders and new glories are introduced with each new stage, but they are invariably accompanied by new horrors, new fears, new problems and new disasters. So evolution is both good news and bad news (Wilber, 1997, 73). He holds that the kosmos laboured mightily for 12 million years in every aspect in an extraordinary and all – encompassing process that hit upon humans. It cannot then cease operating - evolution for the rest of the kosmos and downfall for the humans. "If evolution is operating in the rest of the universe, then it must be operating in humans as well, which means human cultures must also evolve, which means progressively advanced forms of interaction must be emerging.. which runs smack into the contradiction known as Auschwitz" (Wilber, 1997, 68). Such a cultural evolution takes place in a dialectical process through differentiation rather than dissociation, through transcendence rather than repression, and through natural hierarchy (he borrows Arthur Koestler's phrase 'hierarchy', instead of hierarchy) rather than pathological hierarchy. "No, we are part and parcel of a single and all-embracing evolutionary current that is itself Spirit-in-action, the mode and manner of spirit's creation, and this is always going beyond what went before – that leaps, not crawls, to new plateaus of truth, only to leap again, dying and being reborn with new each quantum lurch, and often stumbling and bruising its metaphysical knees, yet always getting right back up and jumping again" (Wilber, 1997, 79).

Wilber claims that through various philosophies and sciences, the objective-empirical and the subjective-intuitive approaches, we are moving towards an integral vision of reality. He holds that any phenomenon can be approached in an interior and exterior fashion, and also as an individual and as a member of a collective. My individual thoughts only exist against a vast background of cultural practices and languages, meanings and contexts; so also, my culture itself

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We move on when there is no immediate results. We resist going back to the book every single day, listening long and lovingly to that Word beneath and beyond all the words, staying with it long enough to hear the beating of the heart of God beneath and beyond the cacophony and clutter of our own making, staying still long enough to find ourselves in God and there to rest - even and especially when such staying does not 'work for me' or 'do' any good whatsoever." Michael Downey, "Luminous Traces: The Inbreaking Spirit amid Cultural Fragmentation", *Review for Religious*, March-April, 1999. P. 129.

has material and social components of technology, forces of production, written codes, social systems and geopolitical locations etc. All these determine my cultural world view within which my thoughts arise. He holds that there are four large camps of human knowledge the individual-subjective camp of truthfulness, sincerity, integrity etc.; the individual-objective side of truth, correspondence, representation and propositions; the collective inter-subjective world of justness, mutual understanding and rightness, and the collective inter-objective side of social systems, structures and functions. Each camp has its own type of truth and validity claims; none of these can be reduced or dismissed (Wilber: 1997, see Introduction).

The point is that every human being has a subjective aspect (sincerity and truthfulness), an objective aspect (truth, correspondence), an inter-subjective aspect (culturally constructed meaning, justness and appropriateness), and an inter-objective aspect (social systems and functions). Our claims of knowledge are based on these domains. When we deny any of these domains, we smuggle them into our own philosophy: the empiricists use interpretation in the very act of denying its importance; the extreme constructionists and relativists use universal truth to deny it universally; aestheticians use beauty alone to claim moral goodness. Integral vision includes all domains. An integral approach is dedicated to an all-level, all-quadrant programme, honouring the entire spectrum of consciousness, not just the I-domain, but also in the we – and the it – domains, thus integrating art, morals, and science; self, ethics and environment; in short, the beautiful, the good and the true.

An integral approach takes us into the consciousness realm, into the Spirit. The Spirit is fully, totally and completely present right now. "We begin with the realization that the pure Self or transpersonal Witness is an ever-present consciousness, even when we doubt its existence" (Wilber: 1997-286-7). There is a non-dual tradition: there is only one spirit, only one God, only Emptiness in all its radiant wonder. 'There is nothing but God, nothing but the Goddess, nothing but Spirit in all its directions, and not a grain of sand, not a speck of dust, is more or less Spirit than any other.' 'Every single location is the entire Kosmos and is equally and fully Spirit' (Wilber, 281 & 282). We rest in the pure awareness of the witness; true seer, empty seer. Then I am not caught in the world of time; past and future are present in simple present. No more inside/outside. 'Spirit is the only thing that has never been absent.' (Wilber, 296)

Is humankind moving towards a new awareness of the eternal Spirit? Is there a culture of the Spirit emerging?

What is interesting in Wilber's thesis is that he is speaking of an

integral approach that does not dismiss science, technology, social systems, economic theories and modern achievements. Instead he calls for an approach, that would integrate them towards greater consciousness and to the perception of the Spirit. The advaitic tradition and the essence of Eastern wisdom is brought into play with the achievements of modern times, working towards an integration. The ecological crisis has brought about the need for an integrated approach to our way of life and our way of knowing – 'I share the whole universe in me'. If I respect this inter-dependency and inter-relatedness, I am in harmony. If I violate this dependency, the earth will turn hostile to me. The food chain and the food web are destroyed. I become a victim of my violations. From another angle, today we are told that the human body communicates information for and from the social system in which it is a part. It is the field in which the interaction takes place; it is available for exchanges; it mediates social structure by itself becoming its image "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society... As a result of this interaction the body itself is a highly restricted medium of expression" (Michael Murphy, 163). The body and the larger society is in constant dialogue. In a well-argued article, Amlan Datta has posited a similar stream of thinking and it is worth quoting at length:

There is something truly special about the present juncture. It appears that human evolution has reached a point where outwardly material hurdles can only be crossed by moral and spiritual means. The ecological crisis is an illustration of this overlapping of the physical and the spiritual. We need a reorientation of philosophy consistent with this task of transition to the next higher stage in the evolution of human culture and civilisation. This can only emerge from a broad-based dialogue and it is possible that the basic message, with suitable variations to match the diversity of the earth, will be articulated in somewhat different ways in different parts of the world. Yet in some way these basics must include a steady striving to combine reason with love, justice with compassion, a search for peace all over the world and an urge for that communion with the universe in which consciousness discovers its ultimate freedom. Failing this, our inner tensions will continue to seek release in collective hatred and excitement, mocking the ideals of humanism, and mankind will remain an endangered species."

*(The Statesman, 25.3.99)*

Are we witnessing today the birth of a new age where knowing and being are coming together resulting in a greater consciousness-birth? The post-modern thesis of 'otherness' and the extreme de-

constructionist relativism are giving way to an integral thesis of 'selfness and otherness' where the other is met in the self and the self is found in the other. The ancient wisdom of the sages had the seed of this integral vision; the simple life-style of the tribals contained this holistic vision.

### 7. Ecclesia of an Integral Approach

An ecclesia is a communion of peoples; a koinonia of the people on the way; a gathering of small peoples of localities. 'Communion' is possible when you are on the border; on the periphery; on the edges reaching out to other peoples of communion. People of the way meet together, expect one another, and move ahead. The Church was formed on the road to Emmaus, in the breaking of bread, in enduring hopelessness and in sharing the hope. An ecclesia includes peoples of all colour, shape and knowledge. Its mark is its lack of a mark. It recognises no border except that it has no border. It is formed on the peripheries where 'calvaries' are manufactured. It is shaped by the 'dangerous memory' of a marginal Jew called Jesus of Nazerath, and so it is renewed in the dangerous memory of all marginal people, in liminal situations. The Church is everywhere the Spirit is perceived; every time people live in the Present, and of any one who sees the Spirit.

Does the Church of the second millennium augur a church of an integral approach? Like the 'scientism' of modern times that insists on a certain type of empirical validity, it looks that the church is insisting on certain type of markings for validity. An integral approach is possible when scientists, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and religionists go beyond 'scientism/reductionism' and enter upon paths of wisdom through their own disciplines. So also, when the church can go beyond certain 'churchism', and view 'ecclesia' in the biblical and wisdom traditions, it can walk along the integral way. The new heaven and the new earth are not limited to the Christian sky or Catholic territory. The Spirit that knows no boundary, the Presence that feels no bounded time, the Seer that sees no difference will make his/her home wherever, whenever and however people become *conscious of the Spirit* and that is Ecclesia. The ecclesia of the integral way is happening in the bold and compassionate stand taken by the numerous movements, NGOs and individuals for the earth and the indigenous people: 'ecclesia la terra' is the hymn of the universe.

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# Impact of Media on Education

George Ponodath

In this article the author looks briefly at the concept of education as it is prevalent in today's society and goes back to explore briefly its past. Then he chooses three media (writing, radio and television) that have left an indelible mark on education. The invention of writing made the guru deathless, radio made the guru omni-present but unseen, television made the guru omni-present and visible, and the invention of the internet made the guru omni-scient. Yet these are technology, they do not really impart education, they only hasten the process of gathering information. The author concludes by giving some hints about the nature of education in the coming millennium.

Education is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misused concepts today. It is often confused with wisdom, knowledge, skill and training. It is considered to be a process of 'enculturation', to make an individual fit into a society. It is strange that even in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* education is defined rather naively. It says: "Education can be viewed as the transmission of values and accumulated knowledge of a society" (see entry on "History of Education"). However the *Oxford English Dictionary* does it better than the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It defines education as the 'formation of the human being'. This of course comprises a larger agenda than the definition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Noah Webster in 1828 defined education as the process that 'comprehends all that series of instruction and discipline which is intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper and form the manners and habits of youth, and fit them for usefulness in their future stations'. Though sounding archaic, that has a broader agenda for education than others but hidden in it is the idea of 'fitting into a given society'. Education has to make an individual think independently, to analyse a given situation or event, it has to form the total person rather than make her / him a receptacle of a given tradition or knowledge of a society, is totally overlooked. In this article, which aims to look at the contribution of media to education, I would like to use the term education to mean the formation of the total human person.

Media, like education, encompass a large area and it is not possible for me to deal with the entire expanse. Therefore I would like

to restrict myself to what I consider three significant 'players' in this area: writing (including print), audio (radio) and visual (television). There is a whole gamut of other media which have contributed to education. For example in India the folk media contribute to education even today. Again, audio does not restrict itself to radio. There are professional singers who contribute to education through their songs. In fact poetry came before prose. This was essential because often knowledge was transferred through rote memory and we know that it is easier to memorize a poem than a given text in prose. Visual, again, does not mean only television. Paintings and theatre contributed a lot to education, especially in the early ages. In every society theatre plays an important role in education. But we cannot deal with all those, we restrict ourselves to the three media mentioned above and their contribution to education. I think more than any other media, it is these that have put an indelible mark on education in this millennium.

### **The Guru-sishya parampara**

Education in the initial stages can be summarised by this phrase – the guru-sishya parampara. There was a magic in this relationship. The guru-sishya relationship seemed to be something more significant than even the parent-child relationship. It was the guru who really prepared the sishya for life. Here the guru knew everything that had to be learned and the sishya received it from the guru. It was difficult to define education. Education was not only developing skills. It was not only gathering information. Real education meant grasping and understanding the deeper aspects of life. (Varuna teaching Bhrigu as explained in the Taittiriya Upanishad could be cited as a clear example). The only medium here was the guru. He was the store-house of knowledge but transfer of that knowledge itself was not the ultimate aim of education, it was more, it was aimed at making the sishya experience that knowledge. This was the ultimate. There are ample examples in the upanishads (Varuna and his son Bhrigu, Uddalaka Aruni and his son Svetaketu, Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi).

The guru-sishya parampara is found not only in the Indian tradition but in almost all early civilizations in different forms. The Incas for example had a very elaborate system of education including a final year when they had to master the Qippu, a series of knots on coloured strings. Their postal system used this to transport messages. The Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization too had their own system of education. Here too one can notice the guru-sishya parampara in some form or other. In all this one can see two clear sides to education. The first was the transfer of knowledge, which constituted information

and skill. The second (even more important) was the imparting of experience. Over the years the former seemed to have gained an upper hand and the latter was pushed to the background. It was easier to transfer information and develop skill than impart experience. Information was transferred orally in these systems. A student had to listen to the teacher and learn everything by rote memory. This had several limitations. The guru had a life-span. He (often not she) could not be duplicated. Information and hence knowledge was not standardized. Enter writing.

### **Writing and Printing: the immortal guru**

Writing was not just a discovery, it was a necessity. The quantum of information and knowledge increased to such an extent that it was not possible for a single person to harness, store and distribute it in society. As the activities of the society became more and more complex, various information had to be stored for future reference. The guru needed assistance. It took a long time indeed to develop this assistance. The Hieroglyphics of Egypt and the Cuneiform written on clay tablets emerged by 3000 BC. Other important written languages include Sanskrit and Chinese (about 2000 BC). Papyrus came to be used for writing by about 1000 B.C.. By 800 BC we see the emergence of the first library. The written manuscripts became an effective storehouse of information and perhaps knowledge to a certain extent.

These manuscripts outlasted the guru but there was one crucial difference: unlike the guru who was a human being, the manuscripts were a technology. In the sphere of education this is perhaps as important a discovery as that of fire or the wheel. Here begins a fundamental change in education or what contributed to education: a change from dependence on a human person to dependence on technology. This trend will gradually intensify with its varied ramifications both on education and society. Slowly this trend will lead to redefine education and the role of the teacher. This became a recurring pattern: every time a technology that has a bearing on education evolves, the role of the teacher is affected and education is redefined.

Learning to read and write became a new function of education. The concept of literate and illiterate emerged. Now there developed another type or guru – the one who knows to use this technology; one who could read and interpret the written text. This guru now taught the learner the art and craft of reading and writing. Though only a newly developed part, learning the skill to read and write was gradually equated with education. This is unfortunate. Reading and writing is only a skill in using a technology. It is not yet education. The guru

often taught the interpretation of the text together with the development of the skill to read and write. Hence skill and knowledge were imparted which constituted education. Formal education emerged. In India large universities like Nalanda and Valabhi had thousands of students and teachers. It is said that over 1500 teachers would discuss over 100 dissertations everyday in Nalanda university. So besides the guru who was the primary medium, there came about a secondary medium – the written manuscript.

When there was a fire in the Nalanda University library it seemed to have burned for several days! That was perhaps an accident. Books were burned even by decrees. During the Ch'in-Han period (221-206 BC) books on history were banned and burned. Scholars who opposed this move were put to death. They wanted a clear break from the past in all aspects. Books prevented that because they preserved history. Such was the power of this new medium.

With the coming of writing, the guru's importance was not lost but a process of erosion of his significance began which would gradually intensify. There was a problem with the written manuscripts: they were not easily available; they were the preserve of the learned and the moneyed. So the guru was still in demand; he was still the easily accessible source of knowledge and education. Enter Gothenburg and the moveable types.

Written manuscripts could now be reproduced with greater ease. They could be preserved longer than the written text. The guru lost his primacy as the storehouse of information. Further, the storehouse of knowledge and information shifted from the guru and the written text to the printed books. Since they could be easily reproduced, they were easier to get. A certain independence from the guru was established. Books as a secondary source of learning which began with the written text, strengthened its position with the printed books. That trend of shifting education from a human being to technology, which began with the written manuscripts, gained further momentum with the printed books. There were other fall-out.

One of the results of printed books was the commercialization of information (not yet of education). With printed books information could be purchased for a price. Gradually this information came to be considered knowledge and the process of gathering it became education. So knowledge became a product that could be produced at will, the quantum being limited only by the demand. It could be easily accessed, used, re-used and discarded at will. Those who had access to this storehouse, studied and used them, attained a certain mastery over them. They were known as the 'learned people'. So eventually they began to confuse the mastery of these products with

education but education is not mastery of a product or technology.

The teacher did not become totally redundant but his role as a storehouse of information was redundant. For quite some time there was no contender for the printed book as a storehouse and source of knowledge but there were problems: literacy was one of them. Though books could be mass produced, it could not be used for and by the masses. Books were not simultaneously usable. The transportation took time and effort. Enter radio.

### **Audio (radic): the omnipresent, invisible guru**

It is significant to note that in most Indian languages radio is translated as "akashvani". It is a combination of two words: akash (meaning sky) and vani (sound). Vani has to be distinguished from "shabda". Vani is a sound produced by a living being. Hence akashvani or radio means the sound of a living being from the sky (or the heavens) or simply by implication, the voice of God. For the villagers, cut off from the rest of the world, radio was perhaps the only medium that brought the rest of the world to their doorsteps. Even today we can see and hear the villagers sitting by the shadow of the trees or on their verandahs in the cool of the afternoon and listening with rapt attention the goings on in the world, filtered through that box - the radio.

In India radio was first commissioned to meet the needs of the farmers. Started in 1956 as Radio Farm Forum, the primary aim was to educate the farmers. The farmers were active participants in these programmes. The evaluation done a year later showed that there was a significant difference between the control group and the others in the 'spheres of awareness and knowledge'. Another notable aspect was that it cut across the literate and illiterate. Radio broke the literacy and distance barrier. All kinds of new possibilities arose. One of them was adult education. Until now education once missed was considered to be unattainable. With radio adult education became a distinct possibility. Radio became a very effective tool in this mission.

Even in other developing countries, Ghana for example, the government and other organizations made a lot of investment in adult education through radio. The MASSLIP project in Ghana started in 1991 is a clear example of the faith in the medium of Radio to bring about significant changes in education, especially in adult women. Radio reached everywhere with such clarity, immediacy and simultaneity, that it soon threatened to replace the guru completely. The sidelining of the guru intensified still further. Unlike the guru the radio brought the distant news; it informed, it entertained. The venerable voice of the revered guru fell an easy prey to the arrogant, vociferous omni present radio. People thought that it also "educated" and indeed

it did. While the guru could reach one or a few sishyas, radio could reach many thousands or millions simultaneously, across rivers and mountains. Radio indeed was a medium capable of educating.

Radio did more than all that; it helped introduce values for things; it helped people's judgement about good and bad; useful and not so useful. Gradually it went a step further and told people why one should buy the new and discard the old. Radio thus brought in a new culture: the consumerist culture. Radio gradually became the virtual salesman of the manufacturer. It is not that the print medium did not do what radio did in this field. Books indeed dealt with values; newspapers and magazines did and are still doing a lot of aggressive advertising for marketing products. In fact it was a newspaper that started it all but there is a difference. The print medium can be harnessed more easily than electronic media. Printed material can be checked, cross checked and analysed more easily than radio. Radio can make statements but their veracity cannot be checked easily. Radio reaches far and wide; it reaches the literate and the illiterate. This faceless guru now can convince the gullible sishya about the need for the new watch, the new bicycle, the new... This was almost like going back to the aural tradition; but instead of the guru reciting the mantra and the sishyas learning it by rote, radio hummed the mantra in soothing melodies. The mantra was different. Very different. This mantra would gradually enchant the listener. There was yet another crucial difference: while the guru could be reached easily for further clarifications, it was not easy for the audience to reach the radio. It was a one way flow!

Radio still left space for imagination; there was room for ambiguity but this also was the weakness of aural communication. The veracity of the message could be questioned because people did not *See*. The effectiveness was so much less because radio could only explain the accident or the gory death. It could only explain the height of the mountains and it could only describe how it looks; it could not *show* it. Aural communication did not often appeal to the emotion directly because people did not see; it had to be processed by the rationality before it affected the emotions of people. True there were audio artists who could make one "see" and "feel" a given incidence (often tragedy) but that was rare. Enter television.

### **Visual (television): the omnipresent, visible guru**

Paintings and other illustrations were used in education from very early ages. In fact our forefathers did not start with writing and speaking, but perhaps by drawing. The cave paintings are an eloquent witness to this. Through these paintings they did not just communicate a message; they inspired awe in the beholder. They touched the emotions; not so much the intellect. They urged people to act: to chase and

hunt. Ever since the cave paintings, one can teach a continuous usage of visual in education till the emergence television. So television did not come without a history; but when it came it was unlike any other visual before it.

Like radio, television too came to the human society with high ambitions. Education was the primary motive when television was introduced in most countries, including India. Even now there is a great demand in India for an entire channel for education. The Maldives Government has set up elaborate equipment and production facilities to educate people through television. Adult education becomes so much easier and effective through television. Even in the so called developed countries there are 'educational' channels. Like radio, television too could break the literacy and distance barriers; like radio it could reach the masses. It was not as easy as radio but technically it was possible to reach anywhere any time, simultaneously.

In education visuals achieved something more than just reaching the people: it proved the guru wrong. Take an example: until the telescope reached the moon, the surface of the moon was thought to be smooth (Chandramukhi). Once people saw the surface of the moon through the telescope the guru was proved wrong; once man set his foot upon the moon, once we saw the lumps and craters on the moon, on our television screen in our sitting rooms, Chandramukhi lost her glamour. The guru lost his significance further.

With television there is no need of a pundit to tell us about the snow-covered mountain tops; we do not need a poet to describe the vastness of the ocean and the depth of the seas; we do not listen to the horror stories of the war. We simply see them all from the comfort of our sitting rooms. There is no questioning it; there is no argument. It looked as if the veracity of the message cannot be questioned any more because it is there to see. Seeing is believing. A picture speaks a thousand words; but that is not all; it told more than what it really showed. It told not only stories but it sold ideology. The way the actors dressed, the colour, the texture and the style had something more to say than just 'playing a role'. It spoke eloquently of a status, of a way of life which was enviable. It manufactured a consent from its consumers.

Television went a step further than just showing reality: it created the "reality". This technology allowed itself a lot of possibilities for artists to vent their creativity. Take an example. Today 'chromakey' is a simple technique by which the background of a picture can be electronically removed and replaced by something else, thanks to this technique. Sitting in the studio, the reporter can be made to look like she/he is in the field. Now with the coming of luma-keying, warping

and morphing, the possibilities are immense. Computer graphics can easily be incorporated and juxtaposed in such a way that a whole new reality can be created out of the imagination of the maker of the programme. In addition to this pictures speak a language of their own when arranged in particular order. Different meanings can be created in the mind of the viewer simply by the way the different pictures are arranged. The great Russian film maker, Sergei Eisenstein has evolved a very elaborate theory about this process. So the television producer can use visuals to tell stories, to construct the world for the viewer; but this world need not be "true" though there is a tall claim to veracity (seeing is believing). The irony is that today the television world is more believed than the word of the guru. And what about information and knowledge? Television dished out a lot of 'information' and apparently knowledge but that was for the masses. It was not personalised. This is the debilitating aspect of all mass media; they always serve the masses; they do not attend to the individual needs. Like radio, television too is unapproachable. It too is a one way process. It was only the guru who could attend to the individual needs. Enter the internet.

### **Internet: the omni-scient guru**

This is the newest player in the field of education. This is not just one more technology; it is the result of the alliance of a number of technologies: telephone, satellite, computer and television. Together they have created not just a technology but a mediasphere; an environment in which the coming generations will live, work or die. It is something that one cannot avoid. True, in the technologically poorer countries its impact is not so evident but it is coming sure and certain. Today one can approach the internet for anything from medicine to meditation, from information on holiday resorts to paying guest accommodations, from entertainment to business, from Sunday homilies to theology of the blessed Trinity and more. It is available in plenty, without any difficulties on one's desktop pc. One can edit, rewrite or ignore these information. It is there for the asking. What is the effect on education?

I think now it is time that we went back to our definition of education. Education is not only gathering information; it is not only learning to analyse and process that information; it is not only learning the skill to read and write or developing a mastery over any other technology. Education is all these and more. There are perhaps three distinct stages in the process of education. Data (information) gathering may be considered the first. The second stage is analysis leading to knowledge. The third stage is wisdom. I think media can at best help the first two stages. They are mechanical and technology-bound. All

that media did was to provide this technology, improving it at every stage to acquire more information, faster and extensive. This is not education. All these may make the person knowledgeable; but not necessarily educated. Education ultimately results in a transformation of the total person (body, mind and spirit) for service of the society.

Here the guru is indispensable but his or her role has to change drastically. Now the really committed educators will not seek to provide their students with information and knowledge. Media can provide these. Teachers can spend more of their time and effort in imparting wisdom through reflection and experience. So the real gurus have not become redundant. With the coming of the media they are relieved of their function as the storehouse of information. Now they can concentrate on real education. More concretely, now the teacher need not spend much time in teaching the process of nuclear fission or fusion; they can ask the students to get it from the library, radio, television or the internet. Now the teachers can spend time discussing the ethical aspects of nuclear fission.

### **Education in the new millennium: the compassionate guru**

I am not a prophet. I am not a trend forecaster. I can only wish for a particular type of education and even here I cannot possibly elucidate everything; I can only hint at some of the characteristics.

Education in the new millennium should take place without competition. It is this cut-throat competition that destroys the spirit of real education. From a very young age a child is pitted against another in this system. The other child becomes not a friend to accompany but a foe to defeat. The child will carry this to adulthood and looks at society not as a home to live but as a battleground to fight and defeat the others in life. Therefore education, at least in the initial stages should be competitionless.

Education should not be a painful experience for anyone, much less for the child. It should be enjoyable. At present because of the competitiveness education has become a painful experience. Often children are forced to go to school at an age when they would rather be at home in a familiar environment and among known people. The school is thrust upon them. They are made to do adjustments which they are often not capable of making. Even if they are taught in a school environment, there should not be the pressure of syllabi and examinations. They should be able to explore and experience the world as freely as they want.

Education should be a process that does not terminate in data gathering but goes beyond to question those data. By and large now

education has come to mean data gathering and (in the later stages) data processing in a mechanical way. Analysis and evaluation is scarcely done in the present system of education. Creativity rather than conformity should be the new motto of education.

Education should be a never ending process. There should be schools and colleges where even adults of any age are free to join and pursue the studies they wish.

Education should not be standardized at least in the initial stages. In fact what should be standardised is not education but perhaps developing skills. Education should be a process where individuals explore in freedom the avenues they like. It should not explore so much what was but what can be.

Education should not be done in a social vacuum but it should spring from and anchored on society, resulting in the transformation of that society. As Robert Slattery says, "The goal of education is to establish a non-violent and non-exploiting social and economic order." (Integral Pedagogy, 1997).

Education should not tolerate mediocrity but constantly strive towards excellence in a non-competitive way.

Evaluation should not be based on the quantum of data gathered or processed but on the degree of effort at creativity and the resulting social utility.

'Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let our society awake'  
(Tagore)

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